













Victor Alexandrov

# JOURNEY THROUGH CHAOS

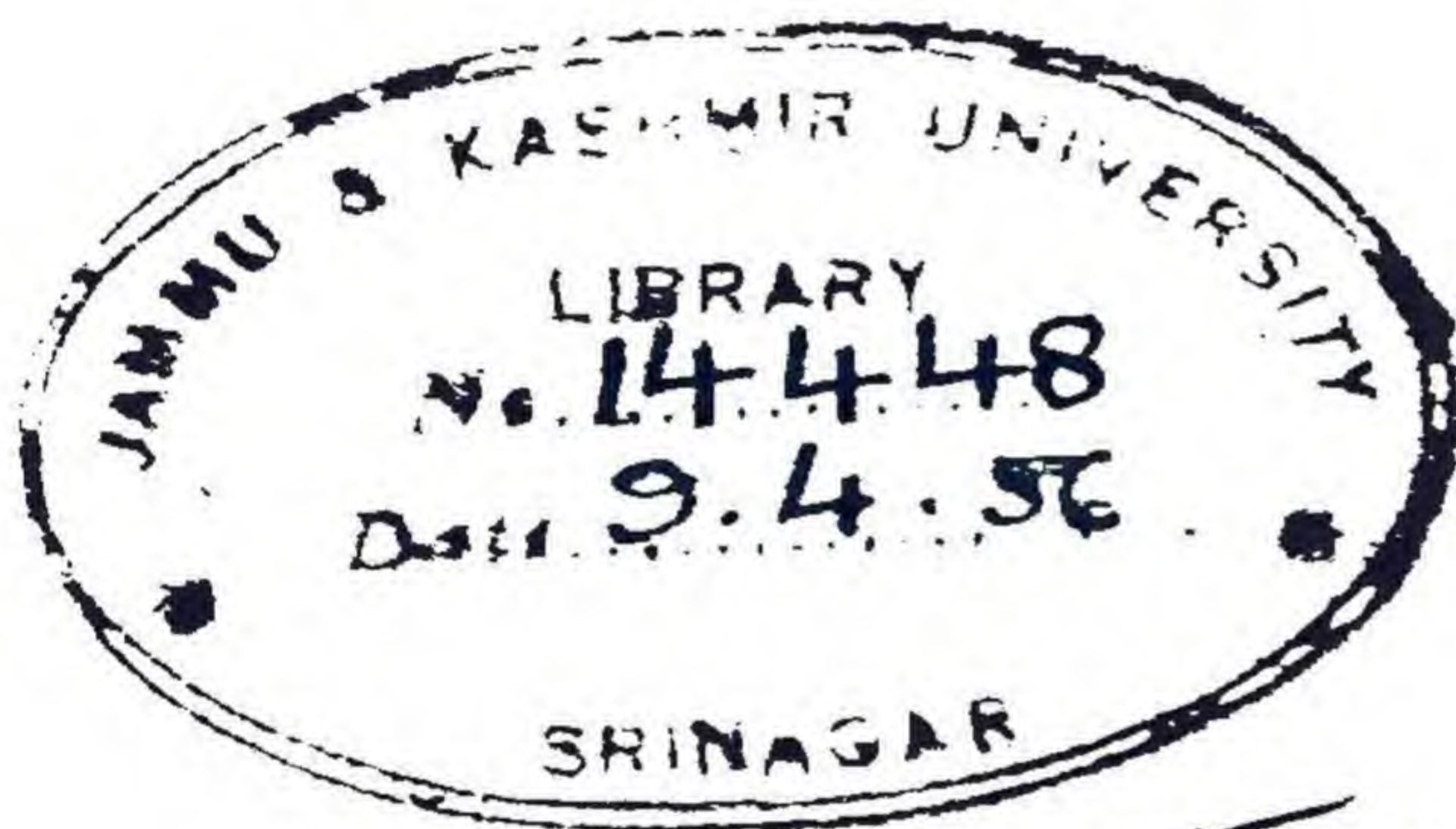
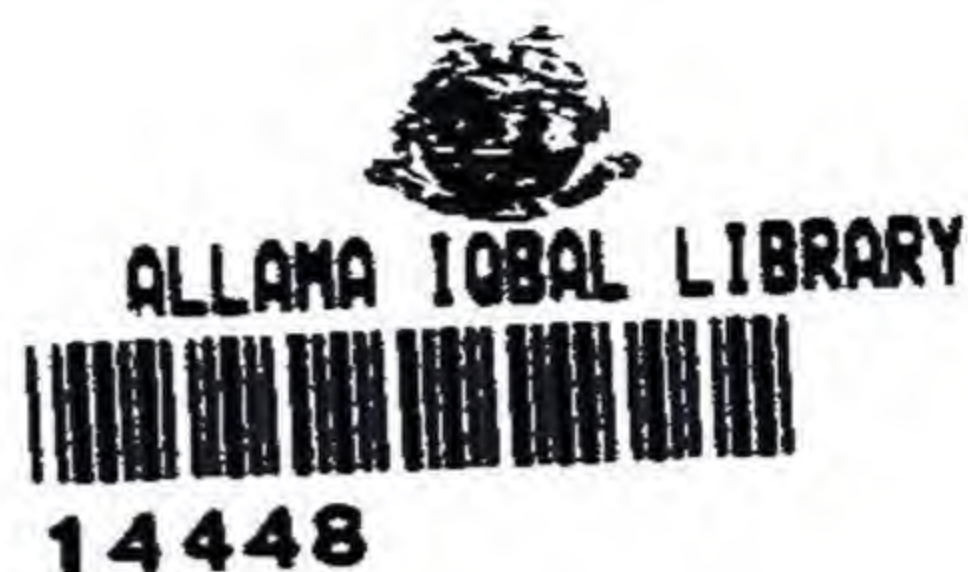
*With a Foreword by*  
UPTON SINCLAIR

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PART ONE

YOUTH IN RUSSIA

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CHAPTER ONE

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MY EARLIEST recollections are of a gloomy street, a canyon walled with dwellings, which I still see as being of towering elevation, and also of a little park haunted by a statue of Pushkin carrying a book. My nurse's nose was purple; the snow was blue-white; and sparrows were fighting for crumbs in a corner. I was exasperated because I could never dry my streaming nose; my gloves were too stiff and my layer of wraps too encumbering. The struggle to raise my hands to that reddened member left me furious with poor Pushkin, with Nurse, the sparrows, and especially with my uncomfortable Naval costume. Petersburg winter afternoons were short. Darkness fell at four.

Ivan, the doorman, used to greet us and inquire after the "little Barin's health". Upstairs another Ivan would open the door for us. We brushed past the second Ivan, the nurse dragging me through the long chill corridors to the children's quarters, where Dunka, a pink-cheeked farm girl of eighteen, pounced on me and pulled off my leggings. This was rather fun; I kicked out at her and sent her sprawling. Her skirts flew up; and I recall as already active at that period of early childhood my first erotic sensations.

But these pleasures were brought to an end by the entrance of my odious, horse-faced German tutor, Herr Doktor, who endlessly discussed with my father ways of whipping me. My father thought a belt would do, but the Doktor, a pedant and a purist, favoured caning. He had brought from Magdeburg a choice collection of canes; once I came on him stretched at ease in a chair in his room, softly whistling *Die Lorelei* and caressing his favourite stick.



From ten o'clock to one and from three to six, he instructed me in German, English, arithmetic, and history. He talked a lot about Frederick the Great, William I, Heine and Goethe. He abominated my French governess and kept assuring my father that his own teaching could come to nothing so long as the atmosphere was polluted by such "vermin", a "pervert", a Parisian! Actually, Mlle. Chariot was a pretty young lady of twenty-five. Reared at a convent in Touraine, she had a fourth cousin who was third under-secretary at the Embassy. She had staked her career on that connection, coming out to St. Petersburg with 75 francs and her testimonials. She was only three years younger than my mother, who detested her from the moment she caught my father staring at her.

The Herr Doktor regarded himself as a member of the family. He would run on for hours about war and politics with my father, who was a staunch Germanophile and enjoyed talking German at home. Meanwhile, I was set down at a little table to copy interminable pages. I was loaded with lessons, beleaguered by mademoiselles, Herr Doktors, English governesses; chained to Latin, Russian history and exercises for piano. At seven, I could parrot four languages and recite from Goethe, Schiller, La Fontaine, Lermontov, and Byron. Bored, baffled, and beaten, by nightfall I would be drowning my grief in tears.

For three detestable hours a day I had to tinkle at the piano. The instrument of torture was white and stood in the middle of an enormous room, also white; the pink embroidered cushion of the piano seat displayed shepherds and shepherdesses playing pipes. My obstinate struggles against these piano lessons were unavailing. Tense with boredom, I drove my inky fingers along the white and black keys. The piano teacher, Elizaveta Markovna, a desiccated spinster in a wig and spectacles, rapped my dirty fingers with a ruler whenever I struck a false note. Nearly all were false. I hated music, but feared my father too much to rebel. In desperation I stared at objects about the room and was brought back to reality by blows from the ruler. The red wig bobbed in time to the beat of "one, two, one, two". I wept piteously but inwardly, swallowing sobs and tears.

One day Elizaveta Markovna complained to my father of my lack of progress. He gave me a good shaking. I put up my elbows to fend off his blows, but between sobs I howled, "I hate music! I hate French! I detest Elizaveta Markovna!"



Then my father grabbed me by the wrist and dragged me into his study, shaking with anger.

"You're going to play, little idiot, and study, and work! I gave you your life—and I'll take it away if I have to."

I listened and looked at the arched windows draped with heavy portieres. Whenever I was in his study I wanted to jump out of the window to punish them all. Then they'd be sorry. My mother, too. She was always talking about the poor soldiers who got killed in the war, and an aunt who had died at a hospital.

"Lazy little beast! Get out now."

I ran from the room, flung myself on my bed and cried bitterly, rubbing dirty fists in my eyes.

The jaundiced light faded. The room was warm. Rain streamed down the window panes. The Herr Doktor shook his bony finger at me and made me inflect the verb *to be*. The lamp was green-shaded. On a shelf were lead soldiers. Before each lesson I would set them up in little groups so that I could look up at them. My fancy then took flight—far from the verbs *to be* and *to have*. There were Italians, French, and British colonials in shorts and sun helmets. The Doktor shook my elbow ferociously.

"Attention, no wool-gathering."

"I'm tired, Herr Doktor."

"Tired? We've hardly begun, lazybones." Herr Doktor knew how to apply his big dry hand so that it left no scars or bruises of which I could complain to my mother.

I was reaching my eighth birthday. Gone were the days of toy soldiers and wooden forts spread across my two rooms and the tutor's. Gone were the tales of Grimm and Andersen, which were at once terrifying and fascinating. They still haunted me. Elves, trolls and goblins lurked behind the brown plush curtains, and Gogol's horrors snatched me choking from my slumber. And how I missed my old nurse, who would tell me of incredible doings in her village in the Ukraine, doings that made my small frame shake and my heart almost burst. Such things would leave me in mortal fear of the long bleak corridor. In that unending passage-way, I never dared look back, but would run blindly, breathlessly, bumping into the walls. Strange faces peered at me, fingers beckoned, voices whispered in my ear. I would burst into the kitchen, for that door was nearest, and Nastia, the cook, would cross herself quickly, nearly as scared as I. I crossed myself after her, then



collapsed at a corner of the long wooden table. My trembling gradually subsided but for hours I remained agitated.

I liked to perch in Nastia's lap. She fed me delicacies forbidden to children, little *pirojki*\* and spoonfuls of caviare. Once she gave me a glass of vodka to drink and then held her sides at my gibberish. She also taught me some coarse expressions, which I repeated at table; my father thrashed me and boxed Nastia's ears. Her husband was a soldier at the Petropavlovsk garrison. He sat all day long in the kitchen drinking tea, sweating, and wiping his forehead and moustache. He used to bring in the wood from the court.

My boyhood dreams of happiness centred on the life in the open courtyard at the back of our house. There, among evenly spaced trees, Tartar rug merchants shouted their wares. An old man, with a monkey and two children, played a hand-organ or "charmanka", that instrument so intimately associated with Russia. The old man played "Maroussia has taken poison and died at the hospital". Nastia, Dunka, and I tossed him kopeks wrapped in toilet paper or stale pirojki, spoiled chops and bits of soup meat, which were snatched up eagerly. The charmanka concluded with the "Marseillaise". The servant girls always listened with suffused eyes to the sad, monotonous tunes of this instrument. Uncle Eugene, a zealous revolutionary regarded at home as an incendiary, would toss out a ten-kopek piece in response to the "Marseillaise". The generous ring of that coin set the monkey and the boys scrambling into a corner and the aged musician would repeat the "Marseillaise" with astonishing gusto.

The kitchen was a fascinating place with a life all its own. There for twenty-four hours a day delicacies were in preparation on the long white tables. Day and night, as though in a barracks, food was prepared for dozens of visitors, for the family, for special banquets and late suppers. The kitchen staff hardly ever slept. Armenian or Tartar rug peddlers would come in and watch the cooks dress pheasants and other fowl. There would be furious haggling over prices which, under the influence of a glass of vodka and a few spoonfuls of caviare, would fall dizzily from one ruble to fifteen kopeks.

The kitchen helps were garrulous, superstitious and illiterate. Their quarters were redolent of rotting wood and cheap tobacco and the cologne and rice powder that they stole and applied with crude lavishness. I recall that my mother once fainted on entering their quarters. It took a whole phial of

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\* Small meat pies.



Houbigant to revive her. She never ventured again into that part of her domain.

The dread mistress of the servants' quarters was an English woman, Riza Porta. An odd name for a Britisher, but it seemed she had married a Portuguese twenty-five years before her Russian sojourn. She was short, fat and ill-tempered, had a wicked tongue and despised Russians, of whom she spoke with an authentically British sniff. With me particularly she was very severe. I countered by knocking off the heads and feet of my little British zinc soldiers and hoisting a flag of victory for the Boers. When she rapped my finger tips with a black ruler, I whistled a Boer march that I had learned from my Socialist uncle. She wound up by giving me a good and doubtless well-earned slap in the face.

This Anglo-Portuguese major domo ruled with a rod of iron, disciplining the servants, distributing their gifts at Christmas, Easter, and Holy Trinity. She dismissed summarily any nurse or chambermaid who struck her as insubordinate or whom she suspected of having a passing affair with some sailor or soldier. She would march into the kitchen, her nose in the air, her lips firm and thin, at her throat a black choker and a gold cross. A fervent Catholic, she began teaching me the catechism when I was six. But the Herr Doktor interposed, the matter came to my father's ears, and that torment, at least, I was spared.

Of my father and mother, I saw very little. My father would send for me to come to his study whenever he heard of my failure to assimilate a surfeit of Anglo-Franco-German culture. The study was an immense room with towering bookshelves. My father sat behind a First Empire table with gilded corners and I was directed to sit in a deep brown leather chair, which virtually engulfed me. Shrinking into a corner of that chair, I expected the worst. It came. I had to recite. I stammered, stumbled, forgot everything, and tearfully pleaded excuses. Then my father would talk to me for a few minutes about my progress. I gave rein to invention, told how I was beaten and hated by my tutors, said I couldn't study all these subjects, didn't like them, preferred the courtyard with the dog Proska, the old man with his charmanka, monkey, and two children. My father rose, very tall and broad, beads of perspiration on his forehead. He took off his pince-nez, which left two deep red marks. A swelling vein on his left temple warned me of the approaching scene. He gripped me by the arm so hard that I yelped, and then chucked me out of the room.



Generally after such a scene my father would not appear in the dining room but would have his meals brought to his study. Through our labyrinth of rooms and hallways and in the labyrinths of my soul, I would continue for hours to hear his strong, well-modulated deep bass voice. The strange man terrified me, he was so intractable and expected so much of me. I was envious of any child in the world who could play games, eat anything he chose, study at a school along with others of his age, and amuse himself in the yard.

The only days that I saw my mother were when a migraine or the after-effect of some ball confined her to her bed. She was very young and beautiful, and sang gypsy ballads with *éclat*. No evening party was complete unless she took her place at the grand piano and beguiled an audience with her low contralto voice. My father was violently jealous of her and would make scenes at table, in their rooms, and elsewhere, so loud as to furnish a topic of conversation for the whole household, from Ivan at the foot of the stairs to Abrek, the rug peddler in the kitchen. Later I understood these scenes better. My father was much older than my mother and of a melancholy self-contained nature, even neurasthenic. He would lock himself for hours in his study, while Mother would either play Chopin waltzes in the salon or shut herself in her room for days, with red eyes and nose, declining to see anyone, even her mother.

That elderly lady, a vegetarian and a devoted disciple of Tolstoy, had been firmly opposed to the marriage. There had been a brief but lavish courtship between my father, a lawyer noted for his eloquence, and the pretty, frivolous, luxury-loving girl. My mother, just out of school, was dazzled by all that his name and fortune might mean to her. I was the luckless issue of this unhappy alliance. The hatred, jealousy and misery of the mismated pair exploded over my head. Pale, pimply and black-eyed, with a mop of tousled hair over my forehead, I was apparently just another disappointment, not clever enough to please my father, not pretty enough for Mother.

My hands were usually ink-stained and I was irretrievably dirty. Even with three washings a day my neck was the colour of weathered oak. One day I was carefully dressed to go to the Cinderella ballet. I wore a sailor suit, the white collar open at the throat and big letters for the cruiser *Gaidamac* on my cap. After the performance, while the Doktor was handing my mother into her carriage, I took advantage of the situation to throw some snowballs at a group of boys selling *semechki*\* at

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\* Dried sunflower seeds.



the corner. A minute later we were rolling in the mud and snow. It cost me a good whipping; my behind was black and blue for three days.

The winters were long, the windows bluish in the morning, yellowish by two. In the autumn rains beat incessantly on the shutters. One was always indoors. Through those long evenings my whole being began to rebel against an authority I could not grasp, an environment I could not at all understand.

## CHAPTER TWO

IT WAS 1916. My father was always at work. There was a war and he was making money. My mother was pale as usual and still played Chopin. My Socialist uncle Eugene was off somewhere in the Carpathians. There were fewer young men to be fed at our banquets, and Nastia in the kitchen was pleased. We had a new chambermaid, Arisha. She was very pretty, called me Victor instead of "Little Barin", and let me sleep in her bed. She was naked and I could feel her skin. She smelled good, her breath was heavy, and when everyone was asleep she would hug me hard. I shivered agreeably and glowed as though my forehead were suffused by a pink cloud.

Yet when I touched her in the kitchen she repulsed and scolded me. It was all inexplicable. One day I saw Semyon, a soldier from the Volinsky regiment, go into her room. He was Nastia's brother and I liked to play with his sabre. It was queer: he was bent over Arisha and was pressing her to him and she had her arms around his neck; they seemed to be struggling but not as children fight in the streets. They were panting heavily, and the air smelled thick, like Nastia's room after a visit from her husband. Pale light drifted from a *lampadka*\* in the corner. I could see Semyon's sabre and belt on a chair. I went closer. They heard me and stopped wrestling. Arisha

\* Incense burner before an ikon.



threw me a furious glance. After that she was cross with me like the rest, and drove me from her room. She no longer let me sleep with her or sit in her lap. And now she called me "Barin". Had I done something bad? Why she had turned against me, I had no idea.

Uncle Eugene came home to spend Christmas, and I was allowed to eat at the table with the grown-ups. He was bigger and browner. He had stopped playing the "Marseillaise" on the piano and was having long talks with my father in his study. Things were going badly, said Uncle Eugene, discontent was general, and the Germans would win the war.

One day two very stiff-looking men in black came and summoned Herr Doktor to my father's study. He came out white as wax, his hands trembling. After two years of war he had been picked up as an enemy alien. When I went to his room for my lessons there was no trace of him or his belongings—except for three canes ranged along the wall. I snapped each one joyfully across my knee. What a holiday! I spent it all in the kitchen, eating, chattering, and listening to the curious things the servants were saying. Everyone was going to the "front", a magical word. I longed to be there too.

It was a Sunday. I saw my mother. She was wearing a long white gown and had a lot of sparkling glass in her ears, at her throat, and on her hands, and she stroked my hair. It was good; her hand was so soft. I had fun, ran all around, and played with my soldiers. My father had gone to Moscow and Riza was in the hospital. What a break! Perhaps she would choke like the people in Grimm's tales or vanish like a wicked fairy. And as for my father, might he not go to the front like everyone else? Why shouldn't he go, too? I had asked him once at table, and he sent me to my room.

For Christmas my grandfather had sent me a huge box of tin soldiers and real Japanese sailors. I was able to rehearse the whole battle of the Marianne Islands; my uncle had told me about it. We were having lots of company—bottles popping all night—they called it champagne. Only black caviare was being served. I didn't like it. I liked the shiny ever-boiling samovar in the kitchen and the plain red caviare given to the servants. There was music all night; a gypsy orchestra played till morning.

The women had a wasted look, Arisha was leaving us; she was going to marry the soldier, Semyon, and work in a rubber factory in the Viborg quarter. Anissima, my baby brother's wet-nurse, cried all the time as she washed the napkins. It was



the front again: they'd killed her husband; and Nastia said her son was lost. There were lots missing at the front. Yet Uncle Eugene spoke of a delightful ball at Warsaw, where Karsavina performed a ballet. A queer sort of front, so different in different places.

Riza Porta returned from the hospital, less fat. They said she had stones in her, which they cut out. An odd notion to have stones hidden in your stomach! No more fun now. Bed at eight o'clock, get up at seven. Cod liver oil in the morning, for they said I was rachitic.

"Open your mouth wide. . . . There you are!"

It was disgusting. Certainly the boys in the courtyard weren't given such swill! They could play with the monkey, pick up all the pennies, and go to bed when they pleased. If only I could run off with them, just right out of there!

Father was back from Moscow with lots of presents for everyone, including Riza Porta, who adored him but spoke to him always in the third person. He brought me a new French-German dictionary, and he informed me after dinner that when Easter was over all my soldiers would be locked up again and real work would begin. It was the last straw. All night I laid plans to escape *à la* Fenimore Cooper and Karl May.

One night I wanted to see what was going on in the salon; there was so much more noise than usual. I stole through the long passageway in my nightshirt and opened the door. The big room was lighted and my mother was dancing a cotillion with a very tall, slim officer; he wore a moustache and a monocle. They were doing an odd step and the officer looked queerly at my mother, in a way Father never did. I stepped forward to get a better look and my nightshirt, which was too long, tangled around my ankles. I tumbled forward into the room. Everyone laughed and stopped dancing. Mother seemed very disturbed. I was put back to bed and Father leaned over me, not cross as he generally was, but rather sad.

Toward morning I got up to go to the water closet. The company had left. Bottles were everywhere and the furniture was upset. The samovar in the kitchen had gone out and Nastia was snoring in her chair beside it. I took a big piece of chocolate cake and while I was stealing back to my room I heard Father and Mother talking in great agitation. Father sobbed out some reference to the officer with the moustache and monocle. Mother began to cry. What was the argument about? Everything was simple in my stories. A scalp was a scalp. Buffalo Bill killed the Indian, and that was the end.



The next morning Riza Porta gave me permission to see Mother and apologize for my brusque entrance into the salon. She lay in bed, surrounded by silk and flowers. When she saw me her eyes grew very blue and teary. Before I could utter a word she stretched out a delicate hand and said, "Poor child. . . . You're so plain!"

I burst into tears myself and this ended the audience.

When there were children here at Christmas, she singled out Boris, the son of a very fat Admiral's widow, stroked his cheek, and said he was nice looking. He had blue eyes, like hers, a delicate white skin, and a straight nose. Lucky Boris. Everyone liked him and he was never beaten. But I didn't want to be pretty. Why should I? I wasn't a girl. I wanted to be strong, ride, shoot, take scalps, and go to the front. I was disgusted with Boris and all the children they had there for Christmas.

Before he left, Boris said I looked like a monkey. I gave him a good drubbing and a bloody nose. Standing in the doorway, he screamed that my father was a Boche, my uncle a dirty Socialist, and that I was a monkey all the same.

Sometimes Nastia would take me to the Nevsky Prospekt and the Ligovka. I liked it there. The people seemed gay: students in groups of three or four with women hanging on their arms, smoking; soldiers and Cossacks with spurs, toques and long curving sabres. The snow melted in the sun. *Semechki*, apples and lemonade were sold everywhere. That was really living! People stumbled out of the *traktirs*,\* looked at me and smiled. A nice old fellow with no bridge to his nose offered me a caramel. He had little laughing eyes and blackened teeth. They made me clean mine every day. I was sure he liked me and we could have fun together.

These people were more my sort.

One afternoon my eleven-year old cousin Gregory and I were surprised at my Uncle Spiridon's house in Kamenostrovskoe, comparing our genitals.

But I haven't told you about Uncle Spiridon, whose image in my mind is ineffaceable. It rises before me now, the bowler hat, the ermine collar turned up: he is at the wheel of a 1910 Peugeot, snorting, grumbling, and befouling the street with expletives. Everyone spoke of him as "The European". No one knew anything about his origin or past up to the day when he met my father's sister, a widow with regular features, large grey eyes and two children. He paid court to her so persistently and with so much "European" finesse that, charmed by his

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\* Saloons.



impeccable French, his Greek diplomatic passport and his beautiful manners, she accepted him.

Uncle Spiridon was wonderful to us children, taking us driving, showering us with gifts. He would come back from Paris with good things—from Picassos, at that time very little appreciated, to fox-trot and shimmy steps just imported from America. I was envious of Cousin Gregory, for Uncle Spiridon never beat him and had promised he would be sent to a *lycée* in Paris when the Boches were liquidated.

Even catching us in the hallway with our trousers unbuttoned, Uncle Spiridon did not whip us. He led us to the library and read us a long lecture on the deleterious effects of onanism, toward which we had undoubtedly been making shy approaches.

He got on rather badly with my father, whom he accused of being pro-German and of failing to offer adequate support to the Allied cause. He spoke slowly in pedantic language, full of Greek and Latin words. He never came to our house without flowers, champagne, or a gift from Eliseyev's tucked under his arm. He complained there were too many Russians in Petersburg, that the Tsarina was a German spy, and insisted he had just lunched with a man who assured him that Rasputin's apartment was nothing more or less than a German beer hall! He admired and esteemed French policy; at his home one might often encounter the third under-secretary of the French and the second under-secretary of the Greek chancellery.

Meanwhile, what with my cousin's mischief, Riza Porta's red nose, and my father's spankings, time passed and it was the winter of 1917. I no longer played with zinc soldiers, my garments all at once were outgrown, fairy stories became less beguiling and I was reading clandestinely *Sherlock Holmes*, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and cheap novels discovered in the rooms of servants, a few of whom could read. I was no longer led by the hand on walks, and spankings gave place to occasional cuffs and blows. I was still a poor student, but my father was too busy to care. He returned late in the evening from perpetual conferences, being now director of three or four factories. And my mother was absorbed with fashion shows, countless modistes, and the treasures of the big jewellers. •

I was thus more at liberty and less harried. When Riza dealt a blow I came back at her with a kick shrewdly aimed at her swollen leg, for she suffered from varicose veins. She would go and complain to my father, who each time assured

•



her he was going to settle with me once and for all. Once he flung a stool at my head when I not only lied but sought to abstract from his library Artzybashev's novel *Sanine* and marked with red pencil the most indecent passage in that book.

My demoralization was typical. Petrograd was in turmoil. Unfamiliar types thronged the streets. Thousands of soldiers, singly and in groups, strolled on the Nevsky Prospekt. Many stank from their debaucheries and kept drawing flasks of vodka from their pockets. Far into the night there was singing and outcry and sometimes shots rang out.

The soldier Semyon, Nastia's brother, came less often now. When he was in the kitchen he spoke louder than formerly; he used big words and talked of meetings and the prospect of a new order. The kitchen staff gaped. Then there was Igor Rodionovich, a seaman of the Baltic fleet. He had great hairy hands and I liked to feel his strong muscles. Now he took his time in drinking his tea; he would linger till midnight and neglected to rise on the entrance of a member of the family. Sometimes he would put his hand on my head and remark: "I like you, little shaver. There's a good time coming. What a pity you're still so small!" Then he would grin from ear to ear, showing yellowed and decaying teeth.

Riza and I were out walking near the Morskaya one afternoon when we heard shots being fired at the corner. I yanked myself loose from her and wriggled through the growing crowd. Someone was lying on the ground, his two boots sticking out of his fur reefer. Mounted Cossacks were rounding the corner. Riza pushed after me, grabbed me by the arm, and dragged me home. I was forbidden to go out on account of the disorders.

My uncle Eugene abruptly returned from the front and joined the Petrograd garrison. Visitors kept coming to the house, but there was little dancing, for everyone talked about politics and the front. One man, a well-known Menshevik, was much in evidence: he spoke eloquently, his black hair tumbling over a powerful hooked nose that reminded me of Abrek the rug-seller.

Then the soldier and the sailor did not come any more at all. Three chambermaids and the big-busted Anissima announced they were leaving us. Mother was wild; little George was only eleven months old and still needed the wet-nurse. Where could we find, in such troubled times, another girl as productive as Anissima, and as well able to account for the origin of her milk? You were sure that she didn't have



either a soldier or a sailor lover, that her father was not a drunkard, and that she had no illness. Adequate assurances in those times.

I was forbidden to go near little George, but I sneaked into his room. He sucked his thumb, refused the bottle, and had twelve hairs on his head. I often counted them. He did nothing but cry and wet. What a boring creature!

### CHAPTER THREE

ONE MORNING in the early part of March,\* 1917, we heard a regular cannonade through the shutters. At lunch there was such a close and loud explosion that I dropped my omelette on Mlle. Chariot. The tac-tac went on all day and seemed to get nearer. In the evening the police set up a machine-gun on the roof of our house. What an idea, when Mother was so nervous and would wake at the slightest sound!

The firing was loud; I couldn't sleep. I crept down the hall, intending to slip in with Mlle. Chariot, but there was already someone at her door who opened it softly and went inside. Next morning I asked her who it was. She got all red and told me to be quiet. Uncle Eugene blushed too. I never saw him so angry and excited. He called me the sort of brat who should be in a reformatory. It seemed you couldn't even ask questions when people acted so strangely, running about like sleep-walkers, bursting into other folks' rooms at night.

Incredible events occurred every day. I listened for hours to grown-up talk. My father said the empire was shattered and spoke of the "suicide of the monarchy". My mother spoke of tornadoes sweeping everything away—just everything. At the Tauride Palace where the Duma met, the revolution was taking shape; a new and unintelligible Russia was being brought to birth . . .

Under our windows right on the Nevsky throngs of people

\* Late February by Russian calendar



shouted for bread. Men and women marched in endless procession. Their cheeks were hollow and their faces lined. They wore workers' caps and soldiers' overcoats and carried banners with blood-red lettering: "Peace and Bread!" The procession marched under our windows and a small group began to sing the "Marseillaise". The song swelled to a powerful crescendo and all the Nevsky Prospect resounded with it.

The night of March 12th I was wakened by loud noises. It seemed that Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, had been ordered to dissolve it. Next day the Guards regiments mutinied. By noon papers were announcing that a new government had come to power. In the afternoon rebel troops occupied all the public buildings. Great excitement in the kitchen: soldiers and workers had seized the Tauride Palace. Nastia, the cook, declared it was a common insurrection of the garrison and workers of the capital.

The following days my father was rarely home. Neighbours and kitchen staff said he was working with the provisional committee of the Duma, which had assumed temporary command. My bosom swelled. The evening of March 13th, we were all assembled in the kitchen drinking endless glasses of tea in honour of Dunka's birthday, when special editions announced the collapse of the last Tsarist ministry. The Committee of the Duma was taking over the ministries and public buildings and had issued orders to commandeer the regiments. My mother's brother, Vladimir, had returned from the front and was with the Petrograd regiments. In the kitchen they said the Tsarskoe Selo garrison had revolted and taken possession of the palace where the Tsar's family was established. Poor little Tsarevich! They always dressed me like him in a blue and white hat with long ribbons and a white sailor suit with two big embroidered anchors on the collar.

But much more was said in the kitchen. Sailors at Kronstadt had revolted. Igor Rodionovich, who hung around our kitchen so much, was most likely a ringleader. Papers appeared every half hour and events moved at the double. Protopopov, a minister despised both in the kitchen and the parlour, had given himself up.

On March 14th, the Grand Dukes proceeded to the Duma to recognize the new government. Grand Dukes are always big and splendid and always mounted. In her room Riza Porta had Cyril Vladimirovich's picture in profile and Nikolai Nikolaievich's on a horse, both in a metal frame of grape leaves.



But news came that the Grand Dukes too had abdicated. It was the end of the Romanovs. A shiver ran through our house. People stampeded from one floor to another, asking questions, gripping each others' coat-sleeves, exchanging long questioning glances. So then. . . ? Now what! The workers had acted, that's all. But the nation? The war! The monarchy! The tradition!

Three days later they were shouting extras in the streets: *Provisional Government Assumes Power.*

Uncle Spiridon, small Gregory's father, showed at table a weary and troubled face. In the midst of war—fifteen million men mobilized!—this government, with no administrative machinery, without popular sanction, could never survive. Revolutionary authority? Bah! Russian clowning. My uncle had no faith in experiments and remained aloof from the enthusiasm that gripped many friends and neighbours.

As spring went into summer, Uncle Spiridon began to urge my father to go abroad at once. He kept saying the Russians were undisciplined barbarians and implored my father to put all our money in an English bank. At dinner he took my father by the arm and talked and talked, looking so funny all the while with his little moustache and that glass in his eye that never fell out.

Sections of Petrograd had already become uninhabitable. After twenty years of service on his beat the *gordovoi*\* who patrolled the area near our house was found lying dead on the pavement, two bullet holes in his skull. I saw my father very little. Apparently he was always doing work for the new government.

One good thing—Boris had stopped sneering at me: they said in the house that my father was to be assistant to the finance minister. He came home every night under escort of two officers who were quite young and blushed at every word. I played with their revolvers and they read to me from Jules Verne. One of them talked English with Riza Porta. They ate with us behind heavy curtains, closed windows and barred shutters. There were four locks on the porte-cochere and two soldiers guarded the entrance. Even old Ivan was armed with a rifle. He had stripped the gold braid off his overcoat.

Ivan's grandson, Kolka, had come to live with him. Only fifteen, he smoked and wore a student's cap and carried a rifle with cartridges at his belt. I saw him one day in a corner of the

\* Policeman.



court flattening a servant girl against the wall. There were so many women now, walking alone at night or arm in arm with someone. If only I could get out and have a good look at them. But no. I was too young. My world was those books, arithmetic, geography, Latin—oceans of them.

The apartment was no longer cleaned daily and my father was furious at the dirt. Mother had been having a fit. Katka, a new maid, had stolen six pairs of stockings, some hats and some jewellery. When they found all that in her room, she howled and let out a stream of coarse words—words I'd never even heard—and then shouted for her fiancé, head of a Baltic sailors' cell. Father said, let her keep the things and be rid of her; but she had no idea of leaving, just called us foul names and went on stealing. Her room was like a pawnbroker's. She wore high laced boots and smoked all day long. Once she passed me a cigarette. I thought she was rather chic and couldn't imagine why Mother took it so hard.

My grandparents came to live with us. Their own part of the city was dangerous. People were stripped of their valuables in the streets after midnight. Callers left our house now in pairs or groups, or else stayed the night. You saw them with waxy faces the next morning: a little bald colonel, who came often, looked like a scared rat. How odd *his* ever being at the front, so unlike my brave little zinc soldiers!

The Menshevik with the wild black locks came earliest to meals and was the last to leave. His chatter was incessant. My mother hung on his words and all the ladies took him for a great orator and statesman. He had written a treatise on pacifism and a chronology of the Romanovs.

As I saw it much later, all that crowd at our place talked a lot but did little to stem the mounting tide of the Bolshevik October Revolution. They trusted to anything except their own energies. They trusted Kerensky, then withdrew their support. They appealed to the Cossacks, to the military caste, to the students, the Ukrainians, Germans, French, British and Finns. But they never dreamed of making any exertions of their own.

So spineless that they could not even espouse their own interests, much less "guard the nation against anarchy and violence", the Russian bourgeoisie either bowed to the tempest or crammed foreign banknotes and jewels into their bags and scurried across the frontier. Perhaps their arch-crime was taking their children along, to grow up in strange lands—a lost generation without a country or citizenship rights.



October had come, bringing the Bolshevik Revolution. The streets were not lighted now. We no longer had sentries at the door or father's bodyguard at table. Mother remained shut in her room. Father vanished for days and came back drawn and hollow-eyed. He didn't scold me any more and sometimes even stroked my cheek. Riza Porta, by rare good luck for me, had left with the British Embassy. She had cried a lot, and tried to press her foolish nose into my cheek, but I pushed her away and merely extended a grimy hand. Everyone was leaving for somewhere: Uncle Spiridon and his family for Finland, my playmate Boris for the Caucasus. I kept asking when we would leave. I hated the apartment and preferred anywhere else.

The upstairs toilet no longer flushed. Taking a book with me I went downstairs. At the most thrilling passage, I heard a knock at the kitchen door. Another drunken searching party! This time it was sailors. They sat in the dining room and food and drink were brought to them. Two vanished into Katka's room. There were giggles and gasps, then one returned in silence. The other stayed on. The searching party did not leave until dawn. Broken chairs and furniture were lying all over. Katka had circles round her eyes and smoked interminably. Nastia called her a slut and crossed herself twice whenever she saw her. The silver was hidden under Dunka's bed where Katka couldn't get her thieving hands on it. Daily arrests and searching parties made our life in Petrograd unbearable. Bags were beginning to be packed. I liked to climb on the trunks. They were big and smelled of mothballs, but there weren't nearly enough for Mother's clothes; she would have needed ten times the number. I helped pack and swiped all sorts of things, from boots to umbrellas, carrying them off to the kitchen.

Mother was very ill and Father had been temporarily detained in the political prison of the *Cheka*. He had been there ten days and everyone could do what he liked at home. I spent my days in the courtyard and basement with Ivan, ate my *bortsh* with him, and life was good. His room was big and dark, the walls covered with mould. His grandson, Kolka, was a great fellow. When I mentioned seeing him in the courtyard with a woman, he laughed, and said that at his age I'd be up to the same tricks.

"Tricks, Kolka? What tricks?"

Kolka laughed and refused to utter another word until I brought him a gift—some collars, neckties and shirts of my father's. Then he told me what you do to women and how



children are born and showed me how to smoke. I thought about it all night and didn't sleep a wink.

After ten days, Father came back from the *Cheka*, haggard and nervous. I overheard him talking to Mother: "Imagine—after refusing me an exit permit, they offered me the post of Assistant Commissar of Finance! I must have made quite an impression on Tovarich Moros and Pines. . . . But work for them? Never!" After a short silence he continued with a heavy sigh: "Now I know it's time to get out of Russia."

My father decided that I should be sent out of the pestilential city with Mlle. Chariot. Later the rest of the family would join us at our villa in the Caucasus. We would all come back when things quieted down in Petrograd.

Mlle. Chariot was no fun any more. She was scared of me since I had seen Uncle Eugene entering her room. I couldn't get a word out of her. But I was pleased. I was fond of our house in the Caucasus, where I had once passed a summer. On clear days you could see the snow-covered peaks of the Elbrus mountains. They let me ride horseback and I liked the Caucasians. I didn't have to study. Besides—there was a whole crowd of boys to play with, living in a village only a few versts away.

## CHAPTER FOUR

ON LEAVING my rooms, my playthings, the haunts where I had felt and dreamed so much, I had no idea I should never see them again.

The Nikolaevsk station swarmed with all sorts of people, spitting and jostling. Excrement was everywhere. We had to fight our way to one of the last regularly scheduled south-bound trains. Russian railway coaches are big and comfortable. On a three-day journey, as from Petrograd to the Caucasus, you take along tea, cake, roast chickens and all that. There weren't any interesting people in our compartment. The



General in civilian clothing, the merchant with an equivocal goatee, and the priest all were silent. They seemed tired, and suspicious of one another, the more so since a young student had joined us at the last moment, carrying in his luggage various books with Marx, Engels and Plekhanov on the covers. One big book especially caught my eye: on the black cloth of the binding were the letters C-A-P-I-T-A-L. The three viewed him and his library askance. I was interested and asked the student where he was bound and what his plans were and what "capital" meant.

We were crossing the woodlands of central Russia. There was little talk, but much smoking and eating all day long. The general ate some of our chicken and shared his tea and sausage with us. The merchant with the goatee tried to get into conversation with the priest and with the rest of us, but made little progress. The men had two days' growth of beard. I amused myself in the corridor with a small wretch from whom I picked up some coarse words. Mlle. Chariot napped in her corner. Several times, men in caps and leather jackets with red arm bands came aboard and examined identification papers, went over the luggage, and left without closing the door, which made the General grumble. As a result of one of these visits, the priest and General—not a bad sort, he had given me some *halvah* and stick candy—were taken off the train. They turned very pale and spoke loud and fast. The men in the leather jackets politely but firmly insisted that we must continue our journey without these companions. The merchant was very uneasy during this scene. The young student seemed amused, but himself encountered like difficulties the next day when some other messieurs, equally courteous but wearing *white* arm bands, made him disembark at a Ukrainian station in the middle of the night, having found that his papers and his photograph did not tally.

The train now made frequent stops where white villages with little gardens and fields of wheat dotted the Ukraine. There were endless red poppies, blue cornflowers, white daisies, round, dark-eyed sunflowers. Passengers came and went in our compartment, stout, wrinkled peasant women of indefinable age, dragging sacks of grain, potatoes, or corn to be exchanged in the towns for furniture, fabrics, or ikons. I could no longer play in the corridor, where soldiers, thin and worn, lay rolled in their greatcoats.

A family of at least three had established itself in the toilet. I thought of my mother and her phial of Houbigant. These



people did not faint. Except when they were snoring, they pushed and shoved with complete assurance of their right to exist. I sat in the midst of a group of soldiers asking them about the front. They opened their shirts and trousers to show me where German bullets had gone in and come out. One very obliging Cossack slipped off his trousers completely to show the scar left on his buttocks by an Austrian sabre. Mademoiselle was hopping mad, but there were four mujiks between her and me and she did not wish to leave her seat empty, so I was free to continue making friends and anatomical investigations. My education for life began then and there, on the third day on that train.

At last a man in a red cap with a white baton on a cord announced our arrival at Essentuki. My scar-covered friends, too, would soon be back in their native villages and ancestral homes in the mountains. I wished I could go with them.

In a sort of procession, first the bags, then I, and then Mademoiselle, set out to find a carriage. It was already evening when a droshky driver reeking with alcohol took us to an obscure hotel. His poor horse, which he beat savagely and addressed alternately as "little mother" and "little father", was a mere ghost of a horse, a bundle of bones. At the hotel we found two bags missing despite all our precautions, doubtless stolen while I was admiring the Cossack's sabre wounds.

Next morning we got to the villa. It was greatly altered. The gardens were neglected and the plants and rose bushes that surrounded the house had grown wild. The conservatory roof was smashed and cobwebs hung in every angle. The old gardener had died; his successor, a veteran of the war of 1904, was an alcoholic, who stumped about the grounds with a wooden leg and snuffled unintelligible words into his dirty yellow whiskers. I spent the first day hunting birds' nests and renewing acquaintance with youngsters of the village. We planned to raid an eagle's nest. Mademoiselle refused to let me go. She threatened to lock me up and write to my father if I kept on associating with village boys who had bad manners and used rough words.

A week had hardly gone by when I heard some distant shooting. At dusk a company of some thirty Cherkesses of the "Savage Division", clad in black burnouses, rode into our estate and took over. At nightfall, using the back stairs, I crept into the garden. I was frightened and curious at the same time.

Women and bottles of vodka had appeared from nowhere.

*Acno: 14448.*



Some of the men were drinking. Others were strolling in small groups under our acacias and chestnuts. Two Cherkesses were cutting up a shoulder of mutton for *shashlik*. Mountain men with rough-hewn faces, fingering poignards with engraved silver hilts, were seated round a fire. Some played guitars, accordions and tambourines. Others sang ballads about their native *aouls*,\* the skies of Georgia and the castles of bandit princes adorning the peaks of the Caucasus. The ground was strewn with melon rinds and bottles. As they sang, one leaped into the centre of the circle by the fire. He was dancing the Caucasian *lesginka*. Another joined him, a man with a long nose and big moustache. Eh, eh! The Cherkesska struck the boots. Silver poignards, toques of astrakhan, lean forms. They bent and spun, encouraged by hoarse cries, clapping their hands, doing figures with the toes of their boots. Shots resounded. Empty wine bottles piled up. The music continued late into the night. The *djigites*† rejoiced. To-night they were drunk; to-morrow there would be fighting, perhaps pillage. The crippled gardener drank with them, a malicious smile on his seamed face, tapping out with his foot the rhythm of the *lesginka*.

Stealing back to my room, I saw the shadow of a *djigite* in the salon. Drawing a large knife from his belt with the dexterity of a bandit, he slashed the embroidered fabric from a chair. I smiled inwardly, thinking of what Riza Porta might have said to this: the chair belonged to a set of Louis XV furniture which my Uncle Spiridon had brought from Paris.

I soon made friends with the Cherkesses. Their thoroughbred horses were glorious. My favourite was Ostap. He was responsive to every movement of hand or knee and I spent hours galloping bareback over the steppe. I, too, wore the dark blue *cherkesska* with black cartridge pockets. Ostap's owner, Chekidge, promised me live cartridges, a whip and dagger, a real one from Daghestan. Mademoiselle spent her hours with a handsome young officer, dark-skinned with an aquiline nose. It seemed he was a bona fide count, not the Caucasian variety that sell rugs, own a herd of sheep, and called themselves "Konas". Mademoiselle became very alluring, was always changing her costume, and wore a rose in her hair. Her eyes dwelt on the young officer languishingly and submissively. They went on all-night jaunts together and I almost never saw her. What nonsense! I wanted to write to my father. The

\* Villages in the Caucasus.

† Caucasian horsemen.



Count disliked me. Once I went into Mademoiselle's room without knocking. She was undressing. The Count grabbed my ear with his nervous, brittle hand and threw me out, threatening martial discipline in the future.

For three days there were no lights and we had to use candles. The tac-tac and the rumble of guns drew nearer. Returning at night from a *mêlée* between village boys and those from neighbouring estates, my left eye swollen and a tooth broken off in the middle, I saw that the stables were empty, the horsemen gone, and with them Mlle. Chariot. She had left two letters on the table, one for my family, one for me, saying something about personal happiness and a unique chance to marry a Count. That was it—she was going to marry that great imbecile with the slim figure and the faultless uniform! . . . The old cripple would stay with me until my family could come from Petrograd.

I was holding the letter, reading half aloud. Behind me was the cripple. I heard a suppressed cough.

"Petrograd is far away, Little Barin—very far."

I turned around and saw his grinning face.

## CHAPTER FIVE

COME FROM PETROGRAD! But when and how? Travel was impossible. Between Petrograd and the Caucasus there were said to be a dozen or more different governments, harried by Red, White, Green, Ukrainian, and German armies, and by bandits.

The crippled veteran scarcely gave me a thought; he discharged his trust merely by placing before me three times a day a plate of cabbage soup with a scrap of coarse bread and a glass of unsugared tea. He muttered into his whiskers something to the effect that it was high time to clear out of here, for one day or another the estate would be seized and would become the property of the local Soviet. Roaming through



the cold empty rooms with family portraits on the walls, with their broken panes of glass and spiders, and hearing the rain on the roof, I began to lose heart.

Two bats got into my room one night. The rain had stopped. A big yellow moon stared in at me through the window. I picked up my bedclothes and went to sleep on the floor by the cripple. He did not wake, but all night I heard him tossing and saying something or other, uttering stifled cries and sobs. Outside I could hear the jackals like a choir of little boys chanting psalms. For the first time I was scared of the Elbrus. I wanted to leave and go back to Petersburg, see my parents, Nastia, and my uncles again, drink tea in the kitchen, pick my nose, and read a novel. Dawn rose slowly and the mountain peaks silhouetted themselves against the horizon. The sky was pale pink and purple; it would be a hot day. I slept and dreamed of the General and his stick candy, of Ostap, and of Petrograd. My jaw hurt whenever I turned over.

I awakened with a heavy head, my forehead burning. The sun was high and copper-red. A queer shiver ran through my body. I was hot and cold. I dropped back on the covers. The cripple was boiling water for tea, his eye glassy, his face seamed as leather, his foot in a greasy slipper. He was poking at the fire with black hands. Dogs barked in the distance. I heard every sound endlessly repeated and everything seemed to assume vast proportions. The snowy mountain slope glowed with a copperish fire. Flames seemed to be everywhere. The cripple piled bedding upon me. My teeth chattered; the fever mounted. A woman, an old Tartar, and the cripple prepared cooling wet compresses. I was burning inside. It lasted all day and the following night. The sun was big and the colour of molten metal. I must have lost consciousness; the last word I recalled was "malaria".

I was delirious for long days and weeks which seemed months. Like the rhythm of turning train wheels, there appeared in my visions the figures of the tall, lean Cherkesse officer, Mademoiselle Chariot smiling, with flowers in her hair; and my mother weeping, always weeping for reasons I could not explain. Around noon the fever would become unbearable. I clutched the bedclothes and prayed. Fear constricted my lungs. The odious sun made me see the mirage of crosses in Gogol's *Night of Horrors*. I lost consciousness. When I came to myself the sun was less hot. It must have been late. Shadows lengthened and dusk fell. A man in a white



coat was bending over me. My shirt was pushed up. As through a fog I heard voices and an unfamiliar voice said, "He must have passed the crisis".

After that my chills at noon were less violent and the days less hideous. The fever was even pleasant. I was very weak. The cripple brought me tea. Praying fervently, he made me hold a small ikon, repeat a psalm, and then kiss the holy image. He made the sign of the cross rapidly many times, then turned round and whispered something in the corner as though to expel some mysterious person who was in the room. The tea smelt of mint and of some strange herb. A little dog was beside me licking my hand. He was grey, with a brown circle under his eye, and of an indeterminate breed, one ear lippy, the other torn off. He got up and barked when the old woman brought me broth.

What with feeble attempts to play with the dog, which I named Flips after a Wilhelm Busch character, and the cripple's ministrations, I began a slow convalescence.

One day the cripple brought me an envelope with many stamps and postmarks on it. It was open and was several months old. I recognized my father's hand. The letter was addressed to Mlle. Chariot. He requested that she take me to Tiflis and there await instructions, and he furnished the names of various friends to whom she might apply for assistance, as at the present time it was impossible for him to reach the Caucasus. He spoke of my studies and asked about my progress. All day I read and re-read the letter and each time it seemed remoter.

In a few weeks I was my old self and was eating my *shchi*\* with relish. I spent my days with some Tartar lads, and soon got to be fairly expert in using their oaths. I devoted myself to hunting with an oak bow the cripple made for me, using iron-tipped arrows, and acquired enough skill with this weapon to be able generally to transfix a lizard, snake, or mole at twenty-five paces. I hated the carnage and would flee from the scene of slaughter.

My life at Essentuki had a marked Oriental flavour, reminiscent of the Thousand and One Nights. There were hare-brained riding escapades and deadly encounters with small shaven-headed and vindictive Tartars. Ali Baba's exploits were pale compared to the ruses we employed to steal halvah with nuts, or melons. When old Ahmet went by with his cart of melons, one of us, armed with a few kopeks, started in haggling

\* Cabbage soup.



with him. While they were bargaining, the rest of us, ambushed in a hedge and armed with long spiked poles, speared sweet melons from the cart and tucked them away. By the time the half-blind old man was cutting the slice bargained for, we were already in full flight; then, discovering the theft, he would reel off a whole page of the Koran and add imprecations too frightful to be repeated. But too late: we would be far away, fighting over the spoils with fists, rocks, and clubs. The ten of us had two revolvers, six hunting knives, some clubs, and an old-fashioned rifle. The harmless folk whom we terrorized did not know where to complain, rowdyism was so widespread. Crime had become commonplace. There were murders for next to nothing, for a watch chain, boots or a new pair of trousers. The victims were often stripped to the skin, even robbed of their socks.

The old cripple moaned that it was the end of Little Mother Russia; the sky had been scarlet red for a week, he said, a portent of blood and fire to come; in the North the cadets were being slaughtered en masse and Red guards were raping White women legionnaires. The cripple kept talking of these women to the old Tartar who would turn up and have tea with him, laughing immoderately in his odd way, and insisting that Little Mother Russia was "burning, burning in Hell's fires", that the Anti-Christ had come, and that anarchists and infidel Jews had seized power in the North; but the God-fearing Russian generals were advancing with priests and ikons to strangle the heretic anti-Christian hydra.

I waked in the middle of the night. There were noises in the large salon; next day the room was bare, stripped of paintings, Gobelin tapestries, and the rest of the Louis XV chairs, including a big armchair embroidered with fleurs-de-lis. The neighbouring houses and villas had long been closed. Their window panes were broken. The caretakers had all left and we were quite alone. The cripple was drinking daily and constantly, his vodka bottle always at hand. He lay on his pallet and coughed and drank, drank and coughed all day long. His face was bluish, his nose red. A neighbouring estate, some versts away, had been burning for two days; no one raised a hand. Torches danced about the place at night like vultures round a carcase.

One morning the cripple refused his tea. He kept muttering about the Anti-Christ, mingling holy psalms with oaths. I brought the ikon of St. Gerasim, which he kissed and held



clutched tight in his grey bony fingers. For some time he had not risen even to go to the toilet and his corner was nauseating. He kept coughing and spitting and ranting. In the evening I brought him some tea. He was quite blue and no longer stirred and his wide-open eyes stared fixedly at the ceiling. His bony hand still clutched the ikon. In a fright I ran to the village. The old Tartar, Mouchamad, came and covered him and said he was dead. Dead! This was my first notion of what it was to be dead.

I stayed a few days at the Tartar's. He had eleven children, five around my age. Nothing could have induced me to return to the villa. One day the Tartar took me to Kislovodsk, where the former occupant of a neighbouring villa was said to be living. He had vanished. Three days later old Mouchamad put me on the train for Kharkov, where some distant relatives lived. Armed with a scrap of paper on which were various permits and stamps issued by local Kislovodsk authorities, I was told that if I lost this document I'd be shoved off the train and would have to walk all the way. It upset me because I had no pockets in my coat and my trousers pockets were crammed with jackknives, dried fruits, stamps, and other equipment essential to a ten-year old tourist.

The train kept stopping and at length we were transferred to another, consisting of freight cars intended to accommodate eight horses or forty persons, but now they had the eight horses *and* the forty persons. Jammed into a corner, I sat whittling with my jackknife. A good woman with a vast melon-like belly lavished on me cold tea and foul-tasting bread. Straw kept getting into my teeth, but it was better than going hungry.

In the middle of the night the train stopped. Cossacks came aboard searching for someone. They picked out a peasant and drove him off with rifle blows. The woman with the swollen belly sobbed and prayed and begged the others to pray also. There were two shots. We crossed ourselves.

A soldier came and flashed his lantern in my face, stared at me, and asked my age. Trembling, I showed him my scrap of paper. Another asked what was my father's business. I said he was a lawyer. They laughed and went off. Why did they laugh? Was it funny to be a lawyer?

We changed locomotives. I dozed off in the small hours. It was raining from a grey sky. I woke with a boot on my nose and a mujik's foot on my stomach. I pushed it off. He got up and struck me in the face with his wallet. My nose bled and the journey continued. Bread and tea gave out one morning and



we were all driven off the train by Cossacks in the midst of the steppe. It had been requisitioned by one of the innumerable armies deploying in this territory. The steppe was like any other, but my hunger was something special and I would gladly have exchanged my most valuable possession, a jackknife, for bread. Everyone had a knife. There were even sabres large and small. But no bread.

Around noon we were all scattered over the scanty, brownish turf, somewhere between Tikhoretsk and Pavlovsk. The women were resting, the men gesticulating and arguing with the Cossacks. But nothing did any good. The horses, apparently more valuable than we, were kept on the train, which slowly pulled away.

Then and there, on the steppe, I made friends with three children from the train, who were to be my companions for long days and nights—yes, and months. Masha was thirteen and was a head taller than I; she had blue eyes, a tip-tilted nose, and two braids of flaxen hair. She had long legs and her chest was as flat as a boy's. She talked little but looked everyone straight in the face. Her two brothers, Mishka and Lenka, were fifteen and ten. Mishka was tall and broad; he had powerful calves and strong, heavy fists. He could carry on his back sacks as heavy as any man. Lenka had only one eye, but it was bright blue and always wide open. All three had set out to rejoin an uncle living on the outskirts of Kursk. Their mother had died in a typhus epidemic and their father had been killed in 1915 on the South-western front. The uncle worked in a factory and had written for them to come and live with him.

I gave Lenka a postage stamp, Masha a dry fig, and Mishka my jackknife, and we became friends and were hungry together and swore never to part. Then, as nothing was to be gained by remaining, we set out walking toward a distant village from which smoke was seen rising.



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CHAPTER SIX

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A VOLUME could be filled with our life in the forests and villages of a Russia in flames, the Russia of 1918-19, rent with civil war, famine and pestilence. We ate anything. We slept anywhere. Our garments were rags. But always we headed north—north towards Kharkov and Kursk.

Mishka and I stole while Lenka and Masha cooked. Like wild animals we became sensitive to every sound in the woods, every rustle of movement. We learnt to interpret every shade of expression on the faces of passers-by, deserters from the army, regulars, or bandits. We slept out, in peasant huts, or in one of the ravaged, half-burned manors that strewed the country. We crossed other bands of small wretches like ourselves, stealing as we did and struggling to wrest a partial livelihood from the soil. Our skins were browned, our hands dry and muscular. We were adept at lying, drinking *samogon*,\* and smoking *makhorka*.† Often there were desperate fights between gangs for a few potatoes, some carrots or fruit, or for leadership.

On the outskirts of Novodimitrevskaya, we fell in with a band of about ten boys and girls and we spent some weeks together. The new life of perpetual strife against man and nature was so hard that it entirely absorbed me and I began to forget my past life and my parents at Petrograd. Sometimes a soldier, gypsy or professional thief attached himself to us and aided us for a time. Often we were caught in the marketplace or in the barn of a mujik, while attempting to steal a ham or a side of mutton, and were severely clubbed. In one such scuffle Vaska, a boy of twelve, was killed by a fist blow in the abdomen. We buried him and swore vengeance on the killer. The next day we set fire to the peasant's hut. . . .

Exploits in the city were more productive, but more arduous. The militiamen hunted us like animals. We would go up to some good woman returning from market and beg a

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\* Home-brewed vodka.

† Scrap tobacco.



kopek for the love of Christ. When she held out the coin we grabbed her hand and threatened that, unless she surrendered her purse, we would bite her and she would contract syphilis. She was usually too startled and frightened to resist and we made a fast getaway, chased by dogs and swearing militiamen. In the evening we shared the booty and drank, smoked, and boasted of our achievements. The girls preferred those who were boldest, least truthful, most thieving, and foulest-mouthed. Often the gang fought long and desperately for these girls. There was no one to interfere and the one with the best lungs, the quickest eye, the greatest savagery would survive.

We observed how the soldiers of Petlura and Machno stopped the trains, took the passengers off, stripped them, carried off those persons who could not pronounce three words with three r's\* and hanged them naked in the adjoining forest. We came upon young captains of the White armies prostrate on the ground with spikes driven into their epaulettes and a spike in each star indicating their rank. The corpse was always barefooted, for boots were worth more than a man's life in Little Mother Russia. We ran into bands of professional bandits escaped from Siberia and overrunning the steppes. They never harmed us; indeed after a raid they would toss clothes to us and worthless Kerensky roubles.

We had our specialists, beggars, thieves, liars, corpse-robbers who were always first on the scene, foragers for birds' nests, wild-duck hunters, those who felled hares with stones, those who caught trout with their hands, those who sang Ukrainian songs and the sentimental airs of White Russia, those who swore an unending blue streak, those who passed smoke through their nostrils or were tireless in their sex exploits.

We ate horsemeat in every guise, boiled, ragouted, or potted with whatever seasonings we could find. Bending over a stream, I could scarcely recognize as my own the face of a little black gypsy robber with long unkempt hair. In fact, I was crusted over like a hard-baked loaf, and soap was a distant memory of something forever lost.

In early October, we established ourselves in the hay barn of a great estate along with two other bands, making thirty children in all.

Lenka soon fell ill. After drinking some water, he developed terrible cramps. Next day we buried him. We were not frightened at death and could no longer cry. Poor Lenka was

\* In parts of Russia some Jews have special difficulty pronouncing the r.



not with us. But life went on; we celebrated the "marriage" of thirteen-year-old Sonka and fourteen-year-old Ivan. There was vodka and much merriment. Ivan wore a long cloak and boots taken from a dead soldier and Sonka was swathed in black plush cut from an old sofa in an empty house. We played the accordion and danced the *Casachok* and other national dances. Mishka was an expert dancer and kicked and squatted tirelessly.

A newcomer, Grishka, had a broken nose, excelled all in profanity, could play the *garmoshka*,\* and could blow smoke through his nostrils. One day he took Masha into the forest and flung her on the ground. I ran after them and beat him off with a whip. Masha gave me tender looks and later kissed me. She let me sleep beside her. We clung close all night, made knife cuts in our wrists to mingle our blood together and swore never to abandon each other. In the long nights that followed, we learnt all there was to know about each other. I told her about Petersburg, my home, my family, and she promised to keep everything secret. When she spoke about her own miserable youth, her little nose would wrinkle up in a funny way, she would raise her slender hands to her neck, where two thin pigtails fell to her shoulders, and, throwing a rapid glance around the barn, she would say, "Now, let's sleep".

I put two fingers to my mouth and whistled thrice, the signal that someone was approaching. He bore a great scar on his forehead. His age was uncertain. His cheeks were hollow and a reddish beard covered his face. The expression of his eyes was at odds with all the rest and especially with his straight, compressed lips, for his eyes were large, grey, and laughing. He was carrying a sack on his back and he limped. We called him Alexei Alexeivich. That evening he ate with us. From the first the gang adored him. He told funny stories, laughed a lot, and never used coarse expressions. He knew how to light a fire and quell a riot. He spoke quietly and reminded me of my home and Petrograd.

Alexei Alexeivich never spoke of his past—whence he came or why he was leading such a life. But he might have been a schoolmaster or a medical student. When he bent over, the scar on his forehead became red and swollen with blood. He must have lost his memory, for he never alluded to past events, and the nightmare of the Four Horsemen who were sweeping across the cities seemed not to affect him. His step was assured

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\* Accordion.



and his utterances commanded attention. He brought out his words drily, abruptly, distinctly.

One night, stretched on my pallet, I related my story to him, telling him of my father and Herr Doktor. He listened attentively and afterwards regarded me with a strange, melancholy expression; he rolled one cigarette, then another, and a third; and we spent the whole night in talk.

One day two soldiers from Petlura turned up. They were evil-looking and ingeniously profane in talking of their native villages, mothers, grandmothers, and entire families. On their arrival, Alexei Alexeivich became nervous, restless, and very pale. He shook every time the sound of their voices reached him. Their speech was Ukrainian and they talked of the village of Semenovka, whose entire population they had exterminated. They had burned a Jewish trader alive; his two daughters were passed through the hands of a hundred drunken and rapacious soldiers.

Alexei Alexeivich listened to the details of this narrative. His hands trembled as he poured out tea; beads of sweat appeared on his forehead, his cheeks were paler than usual and the scar on his temple swelled almost to bursting. I caught in his eyes a cruel light, a light we had learnt to interpret as deadly. That night he lay with his arms under his head, staring at the barn roof. Next day we found the bodies of the two bandits; their heads were severed, but they retained the same brutal and evil expressions. Alexei Alexeivich had disappeared. Everybody missed him; he was so kind and patient and had had for each of us a caress or a fatherly look. There was no one left to cheer us and make us eat the greens that cleared our stomachs of all the filth we put into them.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

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THE WINTER WAS SEVERE. In order not to freeze, we had to sleep all huddled and entwined together under the straw. One morning we had to pour water over two youngsters, a girl of



twelve and a boy of fifteen, in order to separate them; the weather was not responsible; they were flushed and embarrassed. The boy's head was shaved and his ears were pointed. His father had been shot by White marauders and his house was burned, his little twin brother dying in the flames. We went out only for calls of nature. Deep snow buried the entire village. Everyone had lice, a real pest. We scratched always and everywhere. Huge rats, as big as cats, scampered through the barn day and night. We could keep them off only by lighting a fire. Our three dogs were so cowed that they put their tails between their legs at the bare scent of them and retreated to corners whining wretchedly. We counted the days and the hours, but spring was still remote, the late Russian spring that would unbind the rivers. We dreamed of the returning birds, the pure air, and a sun, bright and ruddy but still mild.

Petka was sixteen and came from the village of Isvolsk on the Don; his mother was the widow of a drunken and quarrelsome peasant and, after his death, had developed dubious morals and entertained peasants and soldiers. Anka was two years younger and came from the same village; she had clear, brilliant, frank black eyes. She had a genius for stealing cologne, perfumes, and soap. She smoked from morning till night. Her breasts were as developed as a woman's. At the age of thirteen she had been raped by the stationmaster, who took advantage of the fact that her mother's time was all spent either in the village church or playing endless games of patience with the local priest, who drank a lot and received the few villagers who were still devout.

Anka gave herself readily and without much premeditation. Her eyes always sparkled and her glance and yellow skin were disturbing. Any evening you could see her withdrawing with one of the gang to the pig pen and returning flushed and with her hair disordered.

Petka, with his great square head and massive profile, was furious. He would stand long at the shed door, listening to any sound he might overhear. He forgave Anka everything. His small Mongol eyes, set in folds of fat, followed her with a look that was stupid and abased. Once he sprang at her, caught her by her black hair, and flung her into his corner. We heard continuous shrieks, tears, sobs and groans. Next day Anka's face was swollen and her neck and shoulders covered with great bruises.

One day Anka went off with some Red soldiers, clinging to



the arm of a big blond fellow whose leather jacket was covered with bandoliers; at his belt he wore a large revolver and a map in a leather case, which showed he was an officer. Petka was very calm for several days; he did not play cards with the rest but remained in his corner. The fourth day he was found hanging in the same shed where Anka was wont to amuse herself with boys and soldiers. We drew lots to see who should have his boots and accordion.

Hunger was more acute as winter deepened. We became bad-tempered, rebuffing coarsely all observations addressed to us.

"Listen," we would say, "I'm hungry. Go messing around here and I'll break your jaw."

One day red-haired Dimitri, whom we called Lousy, came in carrying a sack on his back. He said nothing, and went straight to his corner. Everyone got up. Somewhere he had stolen a bag of apples. The news spread like wildfire through the barn. Lousy sat for hours on his sack. His owl eyes were red-circled and took in every sound, every movement. Mates of his mounted guard with him. Everyone knew they were waiting for night to stuff themselves. Quiet prevailed for some hours. Then Vassily let out something like a savage growl. He'd been staring all the while at the sack without stirring, but observing, too, every move Lousy made. Vassily was in rags; he hadn't a tooth in his jaws and his face would scare crows. Yellow pus obstructed his one eye. He wiped it with a ragged greasy sleeve. He was abject, swinging his bare feet and counting: "One, two . . . fifteen . . . twenty-seven. Lousy, hand me an apple. Please! — your mother! Yes, apples—some apples! How big are they, eh? Lousy, tell me! Oh, to hell with you and your apples. I spit on them. You know what you can do with them." He went on counting. Lousy did not answer. His round owl eyes remained fixed.

All eyes were on Vassily, as he crouched and sprang upon Lousy and tore the sack from him. The rest followed and a scrimmage ensued. We beat one another savagely, drawing superhuman strength from our hunger. The apples were rotten and almost inedible. The strongest had withdrawn to corners to gobble their trophies. Lousy crouched over what scraps he had been able to save, tearing them with his few remaining fangs. His nose was bleeding heavily and he stared with his round eyes at the empty sack. All night we heard him moaning. Helpless, starving, and beaten, he could only bellow with rage. The three dogs howled too, as though they feared



they might soon be put in the pot. But we loved our dogs and would rather starve than touch them.

Everyone was asking, what did those huge rats find to keep them so fat?

## CHAPTER EIGHT

"STINKING BASTARDS! Guttersnipes! What's become of all you soldiers of misery, eh? Still alive?" We heard a hoarse shout from the far end of the barn. "How about it, girls? Still selling love for a pound of bread?"

Grandpa Emelyan had returned from one of his foraging trips to the village. He had joined us a few weeks ago and in his slobbering way he seemed attached to the place. He had the smelliest corner of the barn to himself and kept repeating the same stories over and over again. He had had three wives and sixteen children. The wives were all dead and he didn't know where all the children were. Three had been killed in the war and two had died in an epidemic. The rest were working in northern factories. He also had two daughters who weren't satisfied with peasant kerchiefs; they wanted to wear hats, like city folk. One of them had been seen at a disreputable tea shop by an ambulant peddler. She was painted. She had asked for news of their village and then walked out, weeping. Late at night she had been seen in the street, wearing a hat and silk hose. This was a shock to old Emelyan, but he had the art of salving his wounds. He was religious.

"All is in the hands of the Almighty," he kept saying, crossing himself with his knotty, withered hand. "God wills us to live and God wills us to die, and damn the hats and city folk."

He never complained or questioned. He always kept a yellowed letter with him, very faultily written, and made me read it to him again and again. He would stop me after each sentence, cup his ear and interject a "Hm-ahem", then,



"Continue, my lad. What good fortune to be able to read!" The letter was from his son Akim, who was working at a hotel in Moscow as porter and night watchman, and of whom he seemed very proud. It bore the date 1915.

The snow fell heavily. Christmas was coming and vaguely recalled to me the great decorated tree in our big salon alight with a thousand candles. The last week of December our barn came into the line of fire and we had to move out.

Our group fell in with another band of homeless children. They were lodged in a barn about thirty metres long. To get in you had to half-crawl through a sort of tunnel. A ravine separated the barn from the village, where dogs and peasants armed with clubs were laying for us. The crowd here was worse than any we had encountered before. The older ones did not stop with stealing and marauding; sometimes they came in with their hands red with blood.

From the first night we slept in the hay they tried to make up to Masha. She fled to our corner and it took all the force of Mishka's stout fists to defend her. One fellow was especially hateful, Vanka, a big hefty lad, his head shaven and mottled with skin eruptions. He wore a long military coat. The very first day he kicked me in the stomach without provocation. The pain brought tears to my eyes. I was raging and sprang at him. He had long muscular arms, a bullet head, and little evil eyes. Blood streamed down my face, and my blows seemed to make no impression. He was trying to grip my head in his ape-like arms. My blows to the jaw merely brought out a stream of abuse. When his nose started bleeding, I took fresh courage. We rolled on the ground. The others gathered about us, shouting. "Sock him, bastard sons of bitches!" He had me by the throat and I smelled his foul odour. My strength was oozing away. I was choking. . . .

I woke on my pallet, my head burning. The gang was playing cards, swearing oaths at each turn in the game. Mishka, with his broad friendly smile and heavy fists, was beside me, so I was not afraid to sleep.

On the three days a week when there was no market in the village of Ussupovka we stayed at the barn and played cards or pitched kopeks. This market was about the only place to find food that winter. It was three versts away. We invaded the town *en masse* before daylight so as not to rouse the guards. There was a choice of stealing or doing some chores for a



mujik. After the market we scrambled for cabbage leaves, carrots or bones with dogs as lean as us. Bortsh made from such oddments could keep us going for some days.

If we managed to steal any meat, that day would be Sunday. Sometimes a deserter gave us a bottle of home-made vodka in exchange for a plate of buckwheat porridge. Often one of us hung around the door of the little church, assuming a dejected look and making the sign of the cross again and again to pick up a few kopeks. If he failed he stuck out his tongue and peppered the folk with abuse.

The government of the Hetman Skoropadsky and the Germans at Kiev vowed to exterminate us. The Commissars of the Red Army wanted to place us in schools at Moscow and make of us good citizens and workers. The soldiers of the White generals called us vermin to be destroyed. Only the Petlura and Machno bandits left us alone and sometimes let us share in the odds and ends of their booty. Arriving in small carts drawn by little horses, they would attack, pillage, and vanish. Wherever their great sheepskin toques appeared, some unhappy Jew would be found hanged to a tree or corpses would remain strewn about with slight bleeding gashes at throat or temples, their pockets emptied and their feet sticking up.

Meanwhile, we were between two fronts. When the Reds arrived we sang the "Internationale" and listened to stories of White Guardists thrown into the water with rocks fastened to their legs. When the Whites came, we sang "God Save the Tsar", heard tales of pogrom and rape, and how Red prisoners, after endless abuse, were drowned with rocks tied round their necks. Both sides saved cartridges.

One night a group that occupied the farthest corner of the barn robbed a shop. They'd been getting ready for some time. Only the oldest could take part in so perilous an exploit. Their loot was an enviable jumble—bread, cloth, onions, tags of ribbon, peppermints of various colours, and bacon. Once they caught a lad stealing from them. They beat him mercilessly, one holding his head between his knees, while two others hit him with switches. I heard heart-rending screams. He was a harmless enough little boy, always hungry. He often lay for hours without moving even to urinate—only harsh measures kept him from a worse offence. At night we heard him singing hymns in a low voice. He was one of the few who crossed themselves and talked of God. His father, executed by the Red Army, had been an Orthodox deacon. In his prayers



he often used Greek words. He was able to read. One day we read a novel together, which we found in a deserted house.

The town changed hands so often that despite our depredations, we were left in our barn unmolested. But one day Kostia, a tall thin boy of fifteen who had been the chief, joined his three brothers in the Red Army. Vanka was then the oldest and made life a torment. After my fight with him and Mishka's clubbing him when he had nearly choked me, our outlook was especially black. His ape-like leers and claw-like fingers made Masha miserable.

' One day Vanka threw her on his pallet. . . . Later I saw her rubbing her thigh with a wet rag. She was pale and nervous. I asked her what was wrong, for I couldn't see any blood on her leg. She exclaimed, "That's where he touched me. He rubbed me with his . . . It's horrible, disgusting!" She went on rubbing the spot as if she wanted to erase all the shame and vilification.

## CHAPTER NINE

MEANWHILE OTHER TROUBLES brought me to a crisis of misery. One morning we sprang shivering from our pallets and scrambled into our few rags. My breath was a blue steam. We beat our hands on our legs. Masha was kindling a fire for tea. Vanka lay still snoring by a pale twelve-year old, Zoyka, whom he had raped months before—an event he described in detail on the least provocation. Soldiers especially relished the story, which made their eyes shine, and for a drink of vodka Vanka let them amuse themselves with little Zoyka.

The rumble of the artillery was drawing nearer. Towards morning shells began falling. The barn was ordered to be evacuated. I had gone for water, and on my return I was crouching by the fire, shivering, when I felt a terrific concussion. My heart stopped for a moment. A second shock knocked me flat. I do not know how long I remained stunned. I came to and saw the



barn was burning. The boys came running with pails of water; general panic prevailed and grey acrid smoke choked me. I screamed, "Help!" My legs and lower trunk were pinned down by a fallen beam. My heart thumped; I was in a cold sweat. The words I wished to speak did not come or were mere gibberish. I stammered. For several years I went on stammering.

After a while the gang got the fire under control and with united efforts pulled me from under the beam. Luckily I had only a few bruises. That day I knelt and prayed in my corner. It was terribly cold, for a shell had laid open one wall. I prayed fervently. My very soul had been shaken and old memories were churned up of my Petrograd background, my father, mother, uncle, little Gregory, Nastia, and Riza Porta. How fine and warm it had been there and how clean and orderly. My head was heavy, tears coursed down my dirty cheeks, my hands gripped my infested blanket and a lump rose in my throat. All the strength of muscle gained in the last year, the cigarettes smoked, the freedom I had won, weighed as nothing against my little white bed, the court where the *charmanka* played, and my gentle-eyed nurse telling me of God and my guardian angel.

Mishka, his face already bearded, his eyes bloodshot, looked at me with a queer expression. "Scared, eh? And you said your dad was a worker! Bourgeois, most likely!" Mishka hated bourgeois and weakness and praying and intended to join the Red Army as soon as he was able to turn Masha over to his uncle. "No sense crying," he grumbled. "We all die one day or the next."

Mishka was older and bigger and had acquired the deep voice and serious air of a man. He was learning to read and made me talk to him about distant lands and their histories and how the people lived. Once he asked me if I weren't going to join the Red Guards when I grew up and wipe out the capitalists and White Guards. After victory, he wanted to be a worker like his uncle. His harshness both braced and enlightened me. In the whole crew I was the only one of bourgeois parentage. My father was a millionaire lawyer. I began to realize he was rated an enemy of the people, a sort of exploiter and parasite preying on the working class. Some instinct, however, had prompted me to lie about my origin. Like Uncle Spiridon, I became overimaginative, representing my father variously as: Nastia's husband, a Baltic sailor and a worker at the Treougolnik factory in Petrograd. I had once heard of this plant, in which my father was a shareholder.



Life became impossible with Vanka in charge. Order was no longer enforced. Thieving became general and one was in danger of being robbed any night of a well-guarded bit of sausage or one's boots. My newly acquired boots were torn and much too big, but they were about all my worldly goods and I slept with them under my head. I would wake in the night, feel for them there, and doze off again reassured. But my most enviable possession was a warm woollen jersey from an English shop at Petersburg; I had managed to cling to it through thick and thin. Originally dark blue, it was now dirty, grey and tattered. Vanka for some time had coveted this jersey. Once he proposed swapping a jackknife for it; another time he said he would let me go on forays with the older boys or relieve me from carrying water from the creek. I refused.

One day he surprised me near some charred dead trees. "Take off that shirt, you bastard," he said, "or I'll chuck you down the ravine."

His face was ugly and he must have been drinking. I started to run to the barn. But he overtook me halfway, seizing me by the shoulder. We both fell. I was choking with terror, as though Vanka's dirty claws were already at my throat, for this time we were too far away for my cries to be heard at the barn. We fought silently. He was trying to get his arms round me. I bit his forearm and clawed his neck. Blood and foam smeared his yellow face. "Give me the shirt, you son of a bitch!" I struggled in his crushing grip, and sank my teeth in his cheek. He jumped at the pain and sprang up. We were facing each other. He came towards me deliberately, lowering his shaven head and spreading wide his huge hands as though for a death grapple. He was much older and stronger than I. I backed off, trembling, towards the creek. We closed. If he once got my head in his arms, I was finished. I got my leg between his. We went tumbling and rolling towards the ravine. I saw red and was nearly unconscious but gnashed out again with my teeth. We went over the edge in a tangle; neither would let go.

Sharp pains in my knee and in my left arm were my first signs of returning consciousness. Vanka lay two paces from me. Dry blood clotted the bristles of his shaven head. We must have lain there some time. Vanka's face still looked evil and his claw-like fingers held a scrap torn from my coveted garment.

Favouring my left arm, which seemed to be out of joint, I struggled back to the barn, leaving Vanka lying there. He never showed his ugly face again. One of the boys saw him limping



away toward the village. At night when we heard wolves prowling in the ravine, we all sincerely hoped they might get him.

The injured arm kept me in my corner. Mishka stayed beside me; I gave him writing lessons and told him stories of Pugachev and the uprising against Catherine the Great in 1773. The others were grateful to me for ridding them of Vanka and, although I stammered with often comic effect, most of them now treated me with great respect. I could read and write, fell birds with a stone, owned a woollen jersey and was the destroyer of Vanka. Mishka was chief and life went on. But when I heard wolves howl, I was pale and nervous and haunted by my picture of Vanka with his bloody head.

Vanka's girl now went the rounds. She kept pulling up her skirts and showing herself to everyone. When wolves prowled by the trench she would sing in a little thin voice, always the same song about fields, cradles and shepherdesses. She had stopped washing, and smelled so foul that even the dirtiest boys kept away from her. They said she was pregnant. She went out one night looking for Vanka. Snow was falling in great flakes, but no one tried to stop her, for she had grown to be a great nuisance. We never saw her again.

Some invalided soldiers stopped with us. One of them, with a small pox-pitted face, told of women to be had at Kharkov for a bottle of vodka or a pound of bread. As he revelled in the subject, he snapped his fingers, licked his dry lips, and glanced towards the corner where our girls were scratching their heads and hunting vermin. Greasy cards were brought out and some of us joined the soldiers in a game which went on by candle-light till dawn, with foul expletives for every card that was thumped on the cask-head. We were inveterate card-players and cheaters and scrappers. Sometimes the stakes were too high and had to be settled by forfeits of twenty fist blows in the face, or peeling potatoes and sweeping the snow from the doorway. And, of course, we pitched kopeks and had contests to decide who could spit or urinate farthest. While the card games progressed, sleepers groaned and tossed. The air was warm and fetid, and empty bellies were no aid to slumber.

Occasionally men in sheepskin coats and big boots dropped by and stayed the night, resuming their journey in the morning. They were couriers of the Red forces, which were preparing for a spring offensive.

The wind blustered night after night; there were snow-storms of weeks' duration. In the night one would hear through



the storm the savage and plaintive howling of the wolves. Then I would pull the stained and dirty coverlet over my ears; the rough pallet seemed a paradise of warmth and safety.

At the end of April, typhus reached us, taking five of our number. At the first symptom, those stricken had to leave the barn. Some dragged themselves to the city and were taken up by the militia and put in a hospital. Most died after a week or two of fever. Often the end came in only a few days. The sick became delirious, raved incoherently, refusing bread and calling incessantly for water. The soldiers told us infection was reduced if the hair was cut. But often the hair did not grow in again, and girls with bald heads were outlandish objects and generally shunned. Once a Red Army doctor lined us up and stuck a needle into us, although many refused and cursed the doctor in the foulest terms when he came near.

## CHAPTER TEN

ALL AT ONCE spring returned. Silver streams cascaded from the eaves. There were puddles everywhere. The air was pure and smelt of springtime. Bit by bit we got ready to leave, each making his plans for the future. Some would travel towards the Don and the Caucasus, others towards the Volga or into parts of the Ukraine where the famine was reported less acute. I had tired of that life and longed to rejoin my family, so my path was northward to Petersburg. But Mother Russia was in a bad way again, and the Four Horsemen were rioting. Famine, flame, war and pestilence barred my way to the Neva.

We walked for days, leaving the Kuban and Don regions behind. The river flowed slow and grey. Little clouds chased each other through the sky. We were entering the Ukraine steppes and prairies. Here there was bread and bacon. Only a few more days and a few more nights, rain and sun, blessings and catastrophes. We went hollow-cheeked and silent over the short grass of the prairie. When we came to a brook we



would stop and press the palms of our hands against the shiny pebbles or the yielding sand. Thank God the long Russian winter was gone.

Serejka, the youngest in our crowd, cried and rubbed his mattery eyes with dirty hands, his face all smeared with filth and yellow pus. He whined continually, and we took turns carrying him on our backs. He looked around and began to enjoy himself, a small boy with yellowish skin and a pointed nose, which he flattened against Mishka's head as he swung his thin legs in the air.

For days we would encounter no one. Then the first little white house appeared and green wheat bending to the breeze which smelled of spring and of black Russian earth. There was colour, red, yellow, green. Flecks of sunlight lay on the roofs of the little houses and their neat gardens.

There were poppies, cornflowers, lilacs. We stretched ourselves in the soft thick grass and were happy. The ground was still moist from the last rain. The breath of spring heartened us. The landscape changed and we came to a village. We saw the crosses in the burying ground. Like a scene from Gogol. Then the houses, and again the fields and crops, the birds and the sun. People were working in the fields and would sometimes look up and give us indulgent smiles and some bread. A demobilized soldier, his arm in a sling, smiled at us out of friendly eyes.

In the only room of a neat, well-scrubbed hut, a woman with black hair and firm lips served us soup—real cabbage soup with meat. A jug of brown, oven-boiled milk stood on the table along with some wheaten loaves. A hunk of white salt pork hung over the stove, and homemade cherry wine rested on the window sill. I couldn't take my eyes off the clean white tablecloth, embroidered with red cockerels. Two boys with amazed blue eyes stared at us. They talked Ukrainian, which baffled me.

Little Serejka fell asleep in the shelter of a tree branch, his yellow face bright with contentment, his belly distended, his fingers clutching a crust of black bread. As he slept the wind combed the fields. Slow, majestic, the grain bowed. Far off some girls were singing a Ukrainian song. Lights appeared in the windows of the low houses. Two bats fluttered past.

The folk of the village of Slobodka had serious faces and tight lips. They rarely laughed. Grave events had happened and were still impending in this peaceful land. The soldier with the sling lit his pipe on the doorstep, and talked to us of war and peace.



Only a few months ago, calamity had struck these tranquil villages of the Ukraine. One day a steely light had appeared on the horizon, a lava lake, a sea of fire. And the fields of the Ukraine trembled. The music stopped, and the songs after work in the fields. The murderous spider of the West, the army of the Kaiser, came on, trampling the standing wheat; the villages with their grist mills, humpy pigs in pens and flourishing orchards; the rolling hills and palisaded stores of grain. All these stiffly awaited the issue of the unequal fight. Backed by German bayonets, the large landholders with knout and horsewhip were returning to scourge the peasants and get back their estates.

Peace had been concluded between Russia and the German Empire, but the Kaiser's armies did not care about treaties. An army of a million men had begun an offensive against Russia on a front from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The Germans coveted the Ukraine, rich in wheat, grain, sugar and livestock. The Junkers came to restore the feudal system of vast domains. They mounted their machine guns at the entrance of every village.

The peasants defended themselves as best they could. Leaving their cattle, wheat and houses to the invader, they withdrew to the steppes and forests, joining the partisan detachments of the Red Army.

The German occupation was no easy undertaking. When the Schultzes and the Mayers pawed Ukrainian peasant women, they got their heads split with axes, they found needles in their soup, they were shot from ambush. In reprisal, machine gunners wiped out whole communities. As their villages burned, the men clenched their jaws and fled to the forests. At Kiev the traitor Skoropadsky began a reign of terror, and while White armies fought the Reds, the German general staff seized the opportunity to pillage the Ukraine and the region of the Don.

This was a terrible year for Little Mother Russia. Her wounds bled. She was naked and stark, beyond heeding points of honour. On all sides were mortal enemies fully armed and prepared to rend the corpse of the colossus.

But men of destiny had firmly seized the reins of government in Petrograd and Moscow. Their spark was to travel through Europe. New phrases gained currency among a bewildered multitude of 150,000,000: "Those who do not work shall not eat"; "Down with the palaces, long live the huts". . . . The events of 1918 smashed the remnants of old Russian institutions



and government machinery, Meanwhile the Germans took the Ukraine, the British took the Caucasus, the Japanese invaded Siberia, and Poles, Letts and Lithuanians were preparing to gnaw the corpse.

The prostration of Russia seemed complete and final. Generals Kornilov, Kolchak, Alekseev, Wrangel and Denikin were hurling White armies against the ill-organized Reds. Both fought furiously. The Russian mujik left his soil to join the Red forces and exterminate the Whites. Young cadets and scions of wealthy families came from all directions to prolong resistance to the Petrograd government, to restore "order and religion", and revive the dead past. They took no prisoners. They spat in the faces of the slain. They shot all Jews as commissars and all commissars as Jews. Red partisans, on the other hand, hanged priests, former officers, factory owners and landholders. The mujik waked from centuries of deep sleep, shook himself, and killed right and left.

His vengeance was terrible. Neither foreign money nor Allied munitions could save the White armies. For centuries betrayed, the people—the artisans, the workers, the peasants, sent to shambles in the World War—clutched their rifles and swore never to relax that hold until the revolution had triumphed throughout Russia. They were led by courageous men who had known Tsarist oppression and exile to Siberia. Their officers gained in discipline and workers made every sacrifice to supply the needs of the bold spirits who led. They could not fail to win.

Day and night at the Kremlin, men strove to establish new laws and combat centuries-old accumulations of noxious lies. The bourgeois showed his fangs and refused to yield. Countless White armies were repulsed, and their generals, having nothing to offer, took it out in reprisals. The imperial standard became the emblem of wrath and ruin.



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CHAPTER ELEVEN

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AFTER OUR BELLIES had filled out and our strength returned, thanks to the good people of Slobodka, we marched farther north and met the advance guard of the Red Army. We drew freer breath as we strolled in the square before the church, the headquarters of the revolutionary commissars' council. Endless meetings gave loose cohesion to the utterly unmilitary mob. There was no uniformity of dress except that the officers and political commissars had leather jackets. Many were barefoot, others had worn-out *portianki*.\* The civilian headgear was especially incongruous. Everyone shouted and raged over Denikin's victories and the wretched, insufficient supplies that Red officials were sending from Moscow.

And always more meetings in the village square! The mob clamoured for the division commander to speak and justify their hunger and defeat. Masha and I climbed on a cask above the packed throng. Again our stomachs were empty. The White artillery could be heard coming nearer. A lanky, angular man wearing a long army greatcoat came out on a balcony and pleaded for patience and discipline, promising ultimate victory and bread. As he spoke he was heckled by cries of "Liar!" and "Thief!"

We were given some soup that evening and told what was happening among the Whites, and how their drunken soldiery pictured the future. Peasants of the village, who had hardly stopped talking about German atrocities and how the Hetman Skoropadsky had sold out to the enemy, now spoke of the Poles and Whites, who requisitioned everything to the last pig and scrap of bread, and destroyed entire villages in reprisal for revolts.

I exchanged a piece of grey bread for a red star, which I stuck in my cap. I was proud. And I liked these people better than the Whites.

Often we were set to guard the stable where White prisoners

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\* Leg wrappings.



were confined. Nikita was a mere boy, little more than a child, his feet bound with rags, his Russian blouse open at the throat, a lock of red hair covering one side of his ever-grinning face. Thick lips, a black crevice where his teeth should have been, a bit of ravelled fag at the corner of his mouth . . .

He was posted at the heavy swivelled machine gun, an old model called Maximka, the famous Maximka of the Russian Revolution. He was proud of this post, for he was among the youngest in the Red Army. So he treated us others with patronage.

"Here, young one," he would yell, "fetch me some water, eh! And lively, little brother!"

Before you could be off, he would chuck after you whatever came to hand. We respected Nikita. He never molested the girls and had been in two battles. His army greatcoat was taken from a Junker whom he had gutted with his own hands. He was fond of telling that tale. We listened open-mouthed exclaiming, "Oh, Nikita, you're not lying, are you?" Now he guarded the stable and often I helped him bring the prisoners their buckets. Their situation was lamentable. Huddled in a corner, most of them slept day and night. Whenever a soldier came in bearing a slip of paper, they would rise with hunted looks, some of them weeping, fearful that their names might be on it. Every day a few were taken into the political department of the *Revkom*\* located in the village school. They were cross-questioned by a tall man seated on a child's school bench. He was slim and well set up and his face would have been handsome except for a beak which gave him the look of a bird of prey. Then the prisoners were generally conducted by a firing squad to the little wood beyond the glade. Each went pinioned by two Kalmuks. The crackle of rifles made us jump. But when one of us youngsters came in, the Red commissar's harshness relaxed and a winning if melancholy smile played about his thin lips. "We must eliminate them, children," he said, "so that you can live." The line of his fine features was in sharp contrast to the flat Asiatic faces of the firing squad. His leather tunic was always smartly belted at the waist. Two Russian *nagans*† hung at his belt.

Some of the prisoners wrote uninterruptedly; one of them produced verses about flowers, trees, brooks, and springtime. I recall particularly one prisoner named Volgin. He was small and his shaven head and big red ears gave his face an infantile

\* Revolutionary committee.

† Revolvers.



cast. He had almost no beard and spoke in a grave, piping voice. As an artillery officer he had been at the World War front. The whirlwind of events after Brest-Litovsk had swept him into Kornilov's army. Now, a prisoner of war, he was daily awaiting sentence. Strange to say, he was always on his hands and knees hunting cigarette butts. This passion entirely absorbed him. The moment a comrade discarded a butt, he leapt after it with avid hands. By the end of the day he would have collected a number of butts and could roll himself a cigarette with a scrap of newspaper. Then his face took on a look of beatitude. But, gripping his fag, he would then have to start hunting for a match: another hour's crawling on the ground. He would find one, but it would blow out. And then he would weep like a child. His whole world in the brief space before execution was that fag that he couldn't get lighted. He shed copious tears. When the two Kalmucks took him to the little wood, he had his long cigarette in a wrapper torn from some old yellowed illustrated sheet. Nikita had given him a light. He was smoking.

The firing had its usual effect in the barn. A few swore. Others exchanged singularly empty glances. Two officers shook hands. One was young, the other old and lined. I had often brought them hunks of stale bread. The next day their pallets were empty.

At last Mishka, Masha, and I set off for a makeshift railway station in the midst of fields. A dense milling throng filled the little wooden building. They sat on benches, on tables, and on shabby luggage bound in networks of string. Most waited on the tracks. For more than three days they had been expecting the train, resolved to stop it at all costs. They had barricaded the rails with sacks, personal effects and broken chairs, and the men lay stretched out on top of the heap. Trains were so overcrowded that the chances were slim of anyone getting aboard. Putting our poor belongings with the rest, we began waiting too.

Perpetual hunger drove us to steal food. We lost no time picking out a victim—a peasant dragging a sack of flour. He was watchful but at night we managed to get near him. With a knife fastened to a pole, we slit his sack. Bit by bit the flour filtered out in a long white rivulet. It was illegal to traffic in flour, and at dawn I commenced roaring, "Militia! Militia!" The peasant woke, grabbed his flour sack and ran. The sack was rather light by that time. Masha gathered up the spilt white flour in her apron, and we exchanged some pounds of



it for bread and a bit of bacon, which we treasured like gold. We did not eat it but took turns licking it, so that it lasted for days. Occasionally we traded it for other commodities, always managing to get it back by some of our innumerable tricks.

At last the train arrived and an indescribable scuffle ensued on the platform. People leapt on the coaches, climbed up the sides, and were so busy pushing and trampling one another, that they lost track of their luggage and children. If we couldn't get on the train, at least we could fill our pockets. We stole everything from flour to balalaikas, from pocketbooks to St. George's crosses of blackened metal. We applied this manoeuvre to several successive trains. After two nights of frantic exertion, we at last wedged ourselves and our boodle into a coach already crowded to bursting. Two grey-clad soldiers beat off other boarders and pulled the doors to. The crowd stormed the windows. Those inside punched them in the face, but the assault was continued. People climbed on the roofs of the cars. Men of various ages clung to the bumper of the engine. Some half-drunken peasants and a woman with a child at her breast were cleared off the tracks. Finally the driver got the train in motion. Oaths and supplications were flung after it.

We found room next to some peasants. A baby cried all night long. A soldier was attempting intimacies with a woman and disguising his actions rather unsuccessfully. Mishka tried to make up to a young Cossachka nursing a child and got a painful slap.

We passed sacked and burned villages. In the car it was torrid and the train had a rhythmic cadence. Grey sky overhung the forbidding landscape. The train did not stop. There was no toilet, but a hole was pierced through the floor in one corner and a cloak hung upon a rifle afforded a degree of privacy. A woman in the next car was in labour and the train was searched for a doctor or midwife and some hot water.

The people around us were talking of events in the region through which we were travelling, and as twilight fell, their stories heaped horror upon tragedy. Then the lamps were lighted and someone produced a guitar and fell into a sad song about Tartars, brigands, and the Volga.

A man said life at Kiev was good, well ordered; you could buy or sell anything there, the cafés were open day and night, and there was music everywhere. Someone sleeping up in the baggage rack yelled to put out the light; it showed from outside and the steppe was infested with brigands, deserters, Petlura's and Grandpa Machno's followers, and other bands of lawless



peasants who were waylaying trains. Tales of savage mutilations, atrocities were related. Many travellers made circuits of thousands of versts to avoid such hazards. Jews and speculators fared worst, but even simple Russians were not safe.

I dozed off but was awakened in the middle of the night. The train jerked to a stop as though someone had abruptly clamped down on all the brakes. All were in an ague of fright—a chap who knew lots of card tricks, two women who had been talking French, and a doctor with pouting lips who had miraculously appeared from nowhere and delivered the baby. There was firing—it was Machno's troops.

"Your documents!"

Everyone produced his dog-eared identification.

On Mishka's advice I quickly destroyed a pass granted by White authorities and sat tight in my corner. Such alarms were commonplace.

"Comrades, I'm going north to Petrograd," I said in a thin voice, looking up at a huge man with bandoliers and a gun slung around his shoulders. "I'm joining my mother, a washerwoman."

"Father?"

"Unknown."

This seemed to satisfy the man.

The inspection was short. We were herded off the train. Everyone was half asleep. It was still and clear. I would gladly have curled up on the ground. But they loaded us into little carts, piling in men, women and baggage till the axles creaked. And then, with much swearing, we were off to what proved to be a small village, the bandits' temporary headquarters. We were kept there some days.

Masha and I gorged ourselves on *kasha*, while Mishka got hold of a ham bone. The two women, terrified, had stopped talking French. The card-trick expert was less clever than I in answering the questions that were fired at us by a great bearded fellow with one hand in a soiled sling. He shammed feeble-minded.

We saw a band of children, better fed than we had been, but fearfully ragged. They had never heard of our hangout, but their habits were much like ours. If they didn't rob markets, it was because the adults got there first. They begged us to stay and join them.

Again we heard much Ukrainian spoken. One of our group, a rather well-dressed man, talked German. I reeled off some lines from the *Erlkönig*: "Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht



und Wind?" He was surprised by so much knowledge, but our acquaintance was short. He was shot next morning. The card-trick man was hanged near three dead, owl-haunted trees at the village gate. Doubtless he had failed to pronounce his three r's properly.

Our battered company was released to resume the journey. My nose was painfully inflamed and made worse by rubbing; the two genteel women were now in rags, and the doctor's face was sad. He was left to continue the trip in socks and underwear. I had my warm corner, a full belly; and playing cards with Mishka, took little interest in what went on around me, except when my attention was caught by a dirty story or some exceptionally interesting deserter's tale. I was struck with the men's satisfaction at having escaped. Their talk ran on battles until far into the night. They were half-starved and were always hunting cigarette butts in the straw and under the seats, and yet were in excellent spirits. The two women considered them vermin and said so in French. I laughed, picturing their amazement, had they known that the ragged washerwoman's son was following their talk and picking flaws in grammar and pronunciation.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

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I FOUND MYSELF in a hospital at Artemovsk in July, 1919, during the great Denikin offensive. I had lain for weeks in a delirium. A white-clad doctor was bending over me. I could hear the distant rumble of artillery. A Sister was saying it was the Reds' last stand. I could see the empty street from my window. Where were my comrades? My ribs stuck out. I lay in white sheets, happy and peaceful. My most recent memory was of a sudden indisposition and of rising fever while behind the Red Army lines. Then—nothing, an empty gap. And weeks afterward, though it seemed more like months, came this awakening—in a condition so weakened that the past concerned me as little as though it were someone else's past, the history of a relative stranger.

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Bit by bit, recollections took on form and substance. I remembered the train requisitioned by troops, some ill with typhus. Then a large camp. Lying in a hay cart one night, I had seen Masha's face by the moonlight. She, too, was feverish; it gave her eyes a queer expression. In the distance we heard soldiers singing around big campfires. Lean horses were up to their bellies and the tips of their manes in the river. I had pains in my head, a great tiredness, a great need for sleep. I would not even take the soup the soldiers distributed at noon. Masha's eyes shone with a fire I had come to know during the epidemic. It was a mortal fire. Absently I listened to stories they were telling around me, the tiresome report of another battle. Then no talk reached me, only syllables. I saw the worn face of a soldier bending over me. Then penetrating voices—someone shouting that something must be done about these typhus-infected children. I woke up in the night. Masha's place was empty. My blood froze. I understood. The children lay sleeping round the dying fire. My chest was oddly contracted. I shook Sasha, one of our gang, though hardly able to speak his name.

He replied in his strident voice: "She died. Yes, to-night. They took her away."

My head pained again and the chills and fever returned. A lump in my throat strangled me. Masha dead! I went back to bed, shivering. She had gone—all of us would go. I, too. No one would escape. I recalled her last look, her fevered hand mending a torn shirt of mine.

For hours I lay in agony. Then it came to me that Masha had died of typhus. And I had lain close by her and had embraced her. So I, too, would have typhus and to-morrow they would take me away. I felt the disease take hold of me. There were hammer strokes in my head. My heart palpitated. Once I sat up and called, but they were all sleeping and I dared not wake anyone. In the midst of the stifling blackness which thickened from hour to hour, my nerves gave way. Panic crushed me. Again I was in the long corridors at home; evil spirits lurked behind the brown portieres, and I was running and stumbling and not daring to look back. My father was saying with cool contempt, "Coward. Go on back. Go back to the corridor. There's nothing behind the draperies."

"Yes, Father," I agreed. But my heart was a trip hammer. From the draperies they were watching me. Deadly, dwarfish things thirsted for my life. I went but a few steps from the lighted room, and grew rigid with fear. Yet my father's



contempt drove me on—away from the cheerful brightness—and from my mother and her guests, heedless of my terror. “Coward, coward!” The words stung me like a whip.

My life at home had not been gay, and often I had thought of death as a deliverance, for, while it would leave me still lonely, at least I would be unmolested. But since being away, I had felt seething forces in me and a wish to live. Life owed me a recompense for my miseries.

Now in the hospital my body was chained to a bed. My hot head and feverish brain beat out an irregular cadence. Outside a window I could see a square and people sitting on little benches. When the guns roared the other patients crossed themselves. There were ikons on the walls. The Reds were retreating and little by little the old life was being resumed. The Russian tricolour reappeared. The people who surrounded me spoke in a manner familiar to me from my home, and a chubby doctor with pince-nez reminded me of my father. At times the firing was louder. Some of the nurses and doctors crouched by the window with binoculars.

I overheard the doctor saying, “We’re routing that Red rabble. Soon we’ll be in Moscow!” I thought about Mishka, who had joined the Red Army as a scout. Last time I’d seen him he was wearing the big red star and arm band. And Masha was dead. I could not turn over, for my back hurt. The nurses were telling about mass executions of the Reds. I was afraid for my friends and called to the nurse for more news. But she thrust a thermometer in my armpit and laid her hand on my forehead. My shirt was white and my hands clean. I must have babbled in my delirium, for the doctor patted my cheek and promised to send me home soon. He said my father was a true patriot; when the Reds were crushed and an end made of anarchy, I should go back to school.

All day I heard the battle in progress. The Whites were attacking on a broad front. With bayonets drawn and lighted cigarettes between their lips, they advanced step by step, using the technique of psychological attack. The Reds were retreating in disorder. By noon the first automobiles with White officers entered the city. The hospital was trimmed with bouquets. The officers stopped by my bed, clean-shaven and wearing the tight-waisted Imperial uniform, the type Mishka hated. From the street one could hear shouting: “Hurrah for Denikin! Down with the Jews and Bolsheviks!”

A dozen commissars, caught before they could flee, had already been hanged in the square. The White victory was



complete and the long-unfamiliar scent of Houbigant filled the air. There was talk of a triumphal punitive march on Moscow. The head doctor with the pince-nez sighed and promised me a quick return home.

Volleys rang out till dawn; they were executing the Red soldiers who had failed to escape or had tried to hide out in the city. A little soldier with a droopy moustache was pulled from a porte-cochere. He had tried to hide in a flour merchant's granary and was finished off on the spot with canes and rifle butts. . . . Somewhere in the distance an accordion played.

Coming back to life, I grew conscious of restless energies, vague stirrings of purpose. But I said to myself, "To-morrow—to-morrow—I'll get out of here." There was a passion to live, to redress injustices and punish evil. If I could live a few more years—perhaps even until I was thirty—and prove at home that I wasn't a coward after all!

I thought of my hero, Napoleon Bonaparte, and how at nineteen he chased the English from the port of Toulon. I could do things like that if only I could live to that age. That would be the real difficulty; the years were so endless and had so many days, and everywhere, every day, famine, war, and death raged throughout the land. If you died or they killed you at twenty, you would have had a long life and would have no business to complain. But now I wasn't dying any more; I was getting well. In a few years, perhaps, I would be an illustrious general sweeping all before me on those steppes that I knew so well. And no longer fearful of death. I thought of Alexander Nevsky, of Suvorov and Peter the Great, and tried to raise myself from my cushions, but fell back helpless. I thought of my home: if my life were a failure, it would be *their* fault; but no, I would show them. One day they would open the door of the apartment and there I would be in my cap and stars, with my aides-de-camp grouped behind me. Then they'd see their scared little boy. Occasional firing in the street kept breaking into my reflections. My convalescence was slow and my body still weak, but my mind toiled incessantly.

The car wheels beat a tattoo, as I went over impressions of the hospital and of the victory of the White forces. Only recently discharged from the ward, I was still weak, and packed into the corner of a compartment, endeavoured to sleep. Through the half-open window the breeze stirred my hair. I was trying to picture the canyon-like street in Petrograd and



our apartment and how it would look to me now. Had my father and uncles been killed, and would Petrograd, too, be in ruins? Suppose everyone were dead? Then either I might rejoin Mishka and become a soldier or I might peel potatoes and sell lemonade in the market.

Broken with fatigue, I went on travelling as best I could—in baggage cars, on car roofs, and on the rods. Partly, homesickness drove me and partly, curiosity to learn what had happened. For perhaps, unlike the homeless children, I still had parents, ties, and prospects. I might go to school, learn a trade, be an officer, an engineer, or an airplane pilot like a wounded captain I had seen at the hospital.

But always north, north, was my destination. I longed for Petrograd's "white nights"; I wanted to see the city's Admiralty spire, the cupola of St. Isaac's Cathedral outlined against the sky . . . and the little square near our house with the statue of Pushkin that I knew so well.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE PROPHECIES of the chubby doctor were not realized. Denikin did not get to Moscow but I did. A week later I reached Petrograd. It was September, 1919, three months after I had left the hospital at Artemovsk.

The city seemed deserted. A raw wind was blowing loose papers about the streets—theatre posters, public notices, manifestos, speeches by Lenin and Trotsky. I hardly knew the place, last seen fifteen months earlier, when my circumstances, too, were so different. I missed the lively crowds of pleasure-seekers, the students, the women, the carriages and cars and their smiling, self-assured occupants. The leather-clad sentry at the corner with a rifle on his shoulder had a morose and dreary expression. Infrequent cars passed at high speed, driven by men with cartridge bandoliers, frowning and looking tired. The winter palace lay empty and desolate, pierced, pierced by shells from the mutinous cruiser *Aurora*. Gone were



the bankers, merchants, the voluble Mensheviks, the bald little waltzing colonel. Wooden shutters blanked out the store windows.

I turned into our street. There was the little park, Pushkin's statue, and the sparrows. The north wind rattled the door. I went in. There was no one downstairs. I panted up the three flights and paused. My heart pounded and I feared to ring, dreading to find out what had happened to my childhood home. How often, returning with my nurse from an airing, I had stood at that door. But now I was taller, and the hard and hungry life on the steppes had transformed me into a thin, nervous boy; my right eye twitched and I made involuntary grimaces, but my mouth had acquired firmer lines and the set of maturity.

I rang. The long echo ran from room to room and seemed to be stifled at last in the heavy portieres. I began beating the door with my fists and kicking it. Frantically, I shouted. I beat at the opposite door. No reply. I climbed to the floor above. Everywhere was the same mortal hush. Across the entrance to the apartment of little Boris—whose eyes were so like my mother's—was a great spiderweb. The stair was dusty as though long disused.

I dashed down again to the court. The trees had been cut down. The windows on our floor were covered with thick crossed planks. Lonely and destitute, no longer childishly able to accept whatever came, I felt as an adult the calamity of those rooms with their planked-up windows. Then a strange woman appeared and told me the place was empty and everyone had left; but she knew Ivan's grandson and furnished me his address.

An extended hunt in the Nevsky quarter brought me to a dingy tenement on the fifth floor. A bedizened woman showed me a corner with a rumpled bed and some photographs of actresses and of a ballet dancer in a tight *tricot*, pinned to the broken and discoloured wall. Also, clipped from a movie magazine, were likenesses of Runich, Mosjoukin, and Vera Kholodnaya. Ivan's grandson, Kolka, came back late. He had been drinking and did not recognize me. It took me a whole hour and many of the rough words I'd lately acquired to extract any information about my family.

They had fled abroad at the end of 1918. My uncle Spiridon had arranged to send them semi-diplomatic passports from Helsingfors. I obtained my grandparents' address—a shabby quarter on the city outskirts. Kolka was about to join the Navy



and take service on a torpedo boat at Kronstadt. I stayed the night with him, for it was late. The streets were unlighted, and armed patrols with lamps were stopping late pedestrians and examining their identification papers.

I was running, for a fine rain had set in and my shoes were in tatters. I climbed the five flights of stairs. The landings were covered with filth. The hall was dark and I had to feel for the door. I knocked. A gentle voice answered—my grandmother's. The poor old lady's hair was quite white. She knew me instantly, hugged me and wept on my forehead.

They were living all in a heap in one room, my grandfather, very weary and old, and my two uncles—my mother's brothers, Vladimir, who had been at the front, and Sergei, the younger. The room was littered with old clothes and pots, and looked like a pawnbroker's. The walls were crowded with paintings by celebrated masters. Astrakhan rugs and polar bear skins covered the rotting floor boards. Legs had been pulled off the furniture for firewood. The coming winter would doubtless eat up the remainder of the First Empire pieces. There were portraits in oils of my parents by a well-known painter. From a bronze Cupid hung strings of onions and dried mushrooms. My uncle Vladimir habitually wore his old infantry officer's tunic—without the epaulettes, but with the St. George's Cross secured by a large safety pin.

He had spent the first year of the conflict attached to the headquarters of the Grand Duke Alexander Michael and the rest of the war in the Carpathians. He was now gentle and disillusioned. The October revolution, destroying all that he believed in, had been a terrible shock. He would lie on the couch for hours, his fingers yellow with the cigarettes he was incessantly rolling. One day he lost his cigarette holder. He was wretched and baffled and ransacked the place for it, crawling under all the chairs and the bed. In drawn-out discussions he insisted that the tragedy of the Russian intelligentsia had its cause in the savagery of the preceding centuries which had left the peasant ignorant of democratic ideals. He often referred to the Western middle classes as being practical, while the Russian professional men and intelligentsia were detestably idealistic, their humanitarianism a vague dream of a better life. They were easily overwhelmed by a determined proletariat on one hand, and by a selfish privileged class on the other, who, cramming their currency into valises and concealing diamonds in their anuses, fled



leaving their interests in the hands of ruthless, monarchist generals.

Uncle Vladimir spoke of himself as a tired traveller, overtaken by a flood and unable to advance or even survive. As a former officer, he regarded with patriotic shame the demoralization of the Tsarist army and Russia's acceptance of defeat. His shame was not unmingled with self-reproach. He had been obliged to set the example to men sent out ill-armed and often bare-handed, except for sticks and clubs, to fight against the well-equipped German forces. He had spoken to the wounded and to men doomed to extinction, words of courage, love of country, and exhortations to carry the war to a triumphant conclusion, when their only hope was that rifles would be issued as rapidly as they could be taken from the dead and wounded. During the tragic retreat in Galicia the Russians, for want of ammunition, had been helpless to reply to the relentless artillery fire of General Mackensen. The trenches had been choked with their dead.

Upon such sacrifices my uncle had been left to brood in the hospital, where he was suffering from a serious leg wound, while the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was being signed. The martyred Russian army during the World War had sacrificed 5,500,000 in killed and wounded, and 2,417,000 captured—in other words, more than half of the total casualties incurred by all the Allies put together. And the bitter fruit of such exertions was a Russia defeated, plundered and isolated. Uncle Vladimir, a typical representative of the Russian intelligentsia who had always ranked the American Constitution as the noblest of historic documents, saw his world crumbling day by day.

He was eyewitness of the catastrophe of the Russian army, whose officer cadres had been decimated in the first years of the war. When finally, by the fall of 1916, the proper provisions for the army were secured through the common efforts of the citizenry through social organizations, municipal boards, Zemstvos, industrial committees, and military co-operatives, the army was already reduced by its losses to the level of an ill-trained and ill-led militia, pronounced hopeless by the Allied and Tsarist general staff.

On the eve of the March revolution, Uncle Vladimir was among the officers whose task it was to lead an already disorganized mob animated by the one purpose of returning home and avoiding further butchery. The economic, social and military crisis, the emergence of lawless bands of soldiers and workers, the food shortage and the economic and moral



exhaustion of the nation must be laid to Russia's geographical position, her ill-organized agrarian economy, the irresponsibility of her ruling class, and the weakness and impracticality of her intellectual humanitarians. The event was in no sense—though my uncle and many others have cherished that illusion and levelled the charge against one-sixth of the world—a result of Russian-Asiatic barbarism.

Bolshevism sprang inevitably from the turmoil of the army's collapse. Russia had mobilized nearly fifteen million men. Her front extended from the Baltic to the Caspian Sea, to Herzegovina and Persia. During the first years of the war, Russia bore the brunt of the attack. She maintained fourteen armies on that immense front. She endured crushing losses and territorial dismemberments.

Once Russia's national defence had been compromised by Tsarist mismanagement, the effort to continue the war was a madness to which only petty bourgeois elements and war profiteers could be susceptible. On the eve of the October revolution Kerensky and the Menshevik intellectuals staggered under Lenin's slogans as under savage blows. They had contemplated, not a popular, but a palace revolution.

The Constituent Assembly, though it had been called into power by a vast popular movement, was influenced in its policies by foreign ministries rather than by national Russian motives, and made its great mistake in serving the interests of a minority rather than those of the Russian masses.

But while my uncle Vladimir was searching for his cigarette-holder under the couch, a new dynamic energy was rising in the breasts of the people. Russia, menaced by the prospect of universal anarchy, like a tired woman, welcomed the strongest, namely, the Bolsheviks.

The confusion of the times was mirrored in my grandfather's home. My younger uncle, Sergei, desired to join Trotsky's army defending Petrograd. Like many students at the time, he had acquired an enthusiasm for the Soviet revolution, while Vladimir contemplated going abroad or joining the White forces in the South. For days the brothers did not speak. My grandmother cried; she rarely left her bed except to heat up a bit of tea. Grandfather seemed listless about everything and spent much time over a collection of butterflies rescued from the debacle. He arranged and rearranged them all day long, sometimes changing the labels. He kept saying, "Patience, patience. We must wait on events". He had great faith in the British fleet and King George, whom he'd met



while travelling in England. He often went to the Neva, peering through the fog as if expecting the Allied fleet to appear. Every day Grandfather went out and sold some objects of value, a vase, a painting, a gold watch, or a brooch set with various stones. He came back with food, coal, a bottle of paraffin, or some medicine for my grandmother, who for years had been subject to headaches.

One day, after Uncle Vladimir had had a long talk with some man, I was told that I was to go abroad and rejoin my parents. I protested obstinately. And yet, one morning there was I at the railway station with diamonds to the amount of forty carats sewn into the lining of my coat. A Greek and a Lett had been found to co-operate in smuggling me across the Finnish border. With my companions I got out after a number of stations and began walking through a growth of pines.

It was miserable weather. The wind whipped our faces and I could not hear what my companions were saying. One of them had a black, sly face; his name was Papadopoulos. The other was the Lett, Ozolin. They both knew by heart this portion of the frontier and had smuggled out hundreds of refugees. After tramping some hours we reached an ill-lit eating place where a woman served us hot tea. We were to sleep two hours, then go on. It was easiest to cross the border in the small hours before dawn.

My uncle Vladimir, being a very unpractical man, must have said a word too much, and as we proceeded, the Greek seemed a good deal interested in the contents of my coat lining. He made signs to the Lett over my head, but I tried to seem unaware of their machinations. The two could not have realized how I had been schooled in sharp practice. In a little clearing Papadopoulos left me in charge of Ozolin, who was to get me to the Finnish side.

We were now slipping down a pine-wooded slope, from which I could see a Red guardhouse and its red flag with the hammer and sickle. There was a lighted lamp inside and two soldiers in overcoats were leaning on their rifles in the doorway. The wind kept me from hearing their talk. We got around the barbed wire. The Lett knew his way. A few steps now would bring us to the narrow stream that separated us from the customs officers and Finnish guards on the other side. Their white fur collars and caps were visible through the barbed wire. The Lett was close beside me. Instinct developed in the forests enabled me to feel rather than see when he slipped his hand into his pocket, ready to strike. I had anticipated this.



moment ever since Papadopoulos left me alone with the Lett. Yelping loudly for help, I leaped forward and flung myself into the water, hoping to attract the attention of the frontier guards. As I expected, my outcry alarmed the patrols. The Lett was scared off. There was firing on both sides and bullets whizzed very close.

Some hours later I presented myself to the commandant at Viborg and asked him to communicate with my family. The officer, who spoke German, clapped me on the shoulder and soon I heard Father's voice on the phone, followed by my mother's sobs. A servant was sent from Helsingfors to get me. I was welcomed warmly. And when I laid on the table the two little packets with the diamonds, they were no less warmly received.

In the atmosphere of that elegant hotel, the Societätshäus, at Helsingfors, my actual experiences took on an air of the improbable. My father, now quite grey, listened with unvarying disapproval. He frowned when I spoke of fine chaps, friends of mine, who were in the Red Army, and told how we all had detested the Whites. My mother, beside herself with joy on first seeing me, soon went off to dress for dinner. She was still pale and very beautiful; the events of the last months seemed not to have touched her. Some days later I saw the forty carats from my coat lining added to her jewels. All our friends who stayed with us at the hotel—the Grand Duke Kyril Vladimirovich and his family, Countess Witte, Count Chichagov, Countess Natalia Eristova and the others—looked at me oddly, much as if I had some contagious disease.

I felt strangely lonesome in my own house.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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THERE WAS NODDING and whispering wherever we went. We were no ordinary spectacle, the lovely and elegant woman, the tall, broad-shouldered man stooped as with age, his face young



but his hair quite grey, and the boy with a gypsy's skin staring ravenously at the food on other people's plates, importuning the waiters, calling for second portions, and stammering frightfully. My appetite was gargantuan. My first days in Helsingfors were consecrated to eating. I was hungry twelve times a day. I gobbled my own portions and those of my mother, my small brother, and Constantine Constantinovich, my new tutor.

Yet in the midst of a meal I would often gaze into the distance, thinking of the famished creatures I had left on the other side of the border. Then I would be nudged politely and asked if I were ill. A physician friend of the family often joined us and held my hand in his. I talked to him of my stay at the Artemovsk hospital and my life on the steppe. No one seemed able to grasp how I had spent the preceding months. There were sympathetic smiles; my father made agitated gestures; the waiter would bring me a third serving of lamb; and Constantine Constantinovich would knock my elbows off the table.

At first it was hard for me to understand that insensibility. Everyone talked about trifling matters and did bizarre things. My parents spoke only of sending me to a Swiss school where I could play tennis and continue my studies. Yet all the while Mishka was fighting at the front and Lenka's small body with a wooden cross over it slept on by that barn. Correctly clad boys of my age, with whom I was forced to play—including the grandchildren of Countess Witte, and Vladimir, son of the Grand Duke Kyril, later pretender to the Russian throne—stared at me, shied away from me and whispered about me. Their parents used the slightest pretext to call them away.

After my hunger was assuaged, I was more and more eager every day to recross the narrow stream, behold the little house with the red flag and the sentinel, run break-neck for Petrograd, and find Mishka and the gang again.

The girls here dressed in pink and white. They looked startled and shy when they saw me and clung to their mothers' arms, keeping yards away from me. Sitting with my tutor one day in the Café Facer, I swore loudly and horribly; the people all turned and stared, and Constantine Constantinovich grabbed my arm and dragged me away. We were having some wonderful hot chocolate with plenty of whipped cream.

I was sleeping badly and was haunted by recollections. One day I went on the loose and beat up a couple of kids single-handed; after that the whole street was aware of me and mimicked my stammering. But I was now stammering less



and could make myself understood. I took Swedish lessons and read a good deal; Sienkiewicz and Dumas were my favourites.

We moved to a sanatorium at Huevinki, some miles from Helsingfors. There was game three times a day and great jugs of milk. We had buckets of oatmeal for breakfast. Life there seemed magnificent. Constantine Constantinovich took me to hunt partridge and wild ducks. My father spent whole days on a chaise longue. The doctors said that he was neurasthenic and that as soon as possible he should go to Switzerland, Sweden, or some place far from Russia where he could forget everything. My mother danced with officers. The days were cool and pleasant and the nights were long. At dusk I could hear the familiar tac-tac of gunfire. I was so used to it that on quiet nights I had a sense of something missing. The sound carried me miles away—back to my comrades and my delirium. I took cold and developed a cough, then a fever. I enjoyed the fever, for when I got light-headed I could see everything again, as clearly as at the cinema in Helsingfors, where I had seen Chaplin and Max Linder. How they would have laughed in the barn if they could have seen them!

Night after night they were executing the Reds, young peasants who had joined the Finnish revolution. I saw them in their camp as I came back from shooting by the lake. They all looked so young, clean, flaxen-haired, direct of glance, not like our partisans. All night you could see the procession of mothers, fathers, sons and brothers going, lantern in hand, to reclaim their dead. General Mannerheim permitted relatives to recover and bury the bodies.

He had a firm hand, that general, and was the hope of all our friends. Three German regiments had mopped up well for him. Ranks of German graves in the principal square of Helsingfors, with helmets slung on the crosses, memorialized the taking of that city. The Reds had defended every alley and every house; they perched in trees and hid in the glades of Brunspark.

Goose-stepping in behind a band, the Germans had come to create order and restore the rule of Swedish barons and Finnish generals. Swedish had again become the language of the country and the German merchants resumed business.

The two Finnish colonels who ate at the table next to ours and often danced with my mother were big, tall and red-faced. They burst into guffaws at every salvo from the firing squads. My mother asked whether executions would go on all night again and if there would never be an end to the procession of



lantern bearers. She promised a Colonel Vassenius another waltz if he would stop the executions for at least one night. It was so disturbing—and our villa in quiet Brunspark was not yet ready for occupation.

The French and English officers who had taken over from the Germans after the Armistice were a jolly crowd and promised the ladies they should soon see St. Petersburg again. There were toasts to the victorious army of Yudenich and to reunion at the "Yar" in Moscow, when champagne would flow. I remembered the lined foreheads of the men in leather jackets patrolling Petrograd and a man I heard speaking from a shattered monument: "Comrades, they shall never return!" The little Allied captains in khaki danced well. . . . But the sailors of Kronstadt had deep, hairy chests, muscular arms—and the will to resist.

It seemed my father's enterprises were extensive. He was sending large shipments to Germany and his counsel was sought by the government. He was seen constantly with Aarii Kunas, a dry, blond Finn dressed in black and stiff as a ramrod. They had founded a new bank and my father was trying to teach me about interest and per cents. I was zero in arithmetic. I was told boys my age knew how to do simple algebraic equations.

Algebraic equations or no, I had a fearful nostalgia for Russia. My tutor, Constantine Constantinovich, was the one person who understood me. He had a daughter, Ninochka, and a son, Oleg, with whom I played chess interminably. I appeared to be quite good at it and even played with grown-up men. After the checkmate, I ran to hunt up Ninochka. She was so slight, so fine; her father had to talk with her at length and explain that I had suffered a lot and was not nearly so bad as I seemed, before she would consent to play dominoes with me.

Our Brunspark villa was finished. All new, handsome, and sumptuous. Paintings of unintelligible design covered the walls; they said these coloured spots and circles were the latest things. But I preferred the old masters. Father and Mother had open house and crowds came. I was forbidden to appear; everyone was afraid I'd let out some dreadful expression picked up in the rear of the Red Army. While soft, pleasant music came from below I closed my eyes and my book; visions of the past rose before me—the barn, friends, phantoms.

Savoonen was assistant gardener. He was thin and stooped, with watery blue eyes, and he spoke Russian well. Of his two brothers, one was killed by the Germans occupying Helsingfors, the other shot by General Mannerheim's Whites. He had



buried both. When I talked to him of Russia, his face brightened. I told him everything, about Mishka, Vanka in the ravine, the wolves, Zoyka vanishing into the night. His eyes smiled; he understood me; we spent hours together. He was twenty but not much bigger than I. When he coughed, his face became blotched with red and his wide cheekbones stood out. We split a cigarette and after much deliberation determined to set out and cross the frontier into Russia.

Christmas was near. Everyone was busy. A tree was being trimmed. At Facer's they were selling chocolates in red and green stockings. The snow was deep and Constantine Constantinovich went skiing. It was dry and cold; the snow was bluish, the days short.

Savoonen and I left on skis. Soon we were deep in the forest. The night was black, for the moon emerged from the clouds only occasionally and the wind blew in gusts. We went side by side. An icy snow common in that region began to fall. The wind became more violent and soon I was having trouble keeping up with my companion.

Savoonen did not slacken speed. The wind howled and drove eddies of snow before it. I was frightened. But Savoonen stayed by my side and held my arm and we forged slowly ahead. The wind stopped my breath, scourged my face. I staggered, fell, went on. All at once the clouds parted and the moon reappeared for some minutes. We were now tangled in underbrush and brambles. Savoonen gripped my arm. We could not stop, else we would be frozen and buried under drifts.

By now we would have been missed at home. We pushed on east. I had a feeling that if I once halted I could not take another step, so I kept on my feet and stuck by the adventure. Savoonen was coughing badly. I was half unconscious. The wind blew yet harder. The tempest was loosed.

I dreaded the underbrush on the next slope. Savoonen knew that awaiting us on the plains was barbed wire, with sentries every few hundred paces ready at the slightest alarm to open machine-gun fire. The cold seeped into me; I could feel my face and arms stiffening. Another burst of moonlight disclosed briefly the austere Finnish landscape. The next moment of brightness showed us the plain and a shack; it was only some metres distant, yet the few remaining steps were an eternity. I was half frozen.

We pried loose some planks barring the door, and flung ourselves in the hay. It felt warm. I woke in the night to hear muffled movements outside, then scratching at the door, and



wolves howling. I was paralyzed and my inarticulate cry failed to rouse my snoring companion. The wind blew in wild gusts, cracking limbs from the trees. But at last the noises and my tremors subsided.

From a sleep of exhaustion I was roused by the door creaking open, the tramp of heavy boots, and a vision of red-faced men in pelisses and caps trimmed with white fur. A ray of light showed me that they were carrying rifles. A detachment of troops was outside. We had fallen into the hands of a Finnish frontier patrol. Savoonen still slept in the hay.

He was shot an hour later in the court of the guard barracks. Upon his left arm were tattooed the first lines of the "Internationale". He stepped tiredly to the wall, coughing worse than usual. His eyes were frightened, but he asked that they should not be bandaged; he wished, in dying, to look at his native pines.

I knelt and wept for Savoonen and continued kneeling as I begged the captain to let me go on. Waking in the hut and rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I had looked at a little wood, the last scrap of Finnish soil. Beyond was the barbed wire and Russia, to which I was never to return.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE COMMANDANT of the post questioned me at length. There was telephoning and red tape. That evening Aarii Kunas arrived with two officers in a grey army car. He looked at me severely and signed a lot of papers. Then he took me by the hand and we set out on a night journey. He conducted me straight to Constantine Constantinovich, who had a little house with a garden, and there I remained. My parents did not appear. Everyone viewed me with reprobation. I passed days by myself and only rarely played a game of chess with Constantine Constantinovich. I chopped wood, made little paintings and read day and night. I gathered that my father's idea was to place me in some sort of house of correction.



My first interview with him was stormy. He cuffed me and I protected myself as best I could, shielding my face with my hands and then bolting and thrusting tables and chairs in his way, which increased his fury.

Then I went down with influenza and my fever dreams were a medley of memories and emotions. There were the detestable red-faced officers in white uniforms, so courteous to my parents, so chivalrous as they bowed over ladies' hands, yet such ruthless beasts to poor Savoonen. In delirium I heard his pleas and promises never to return to Finland, heard his death verdict read with cold formality. Then he was dragged away. . . . I woke up bathed in sweat. His death had affected me more than the casual slaughters I had seen perpetrated by Reds and Whites. I remembered him peaceably planting his marguerites and caressing his tulips. The gentleness of his expression was ineffaceable from my mind. His one error was heeding the counsel of a silly, obstinate brat.

Constantine Constantinovich talked at length of my father. His heart was not strong and I was causing him great distress. Father wanted me to succeed to the control of his vast industrial enterprises. The Russian revolution had taken much, but he was still a rich man and was planning to settle in Switzerland. Constantine Constantinovich would go with us and I would be sent to a Swiss school. I thought of all that I had seen and read—a jumble of books and experiences unsuited to my age. I had formed odd notions of life, for I was more mature mentally than I was physically. And yet, despite my sickness, I was physically sound, even robust, and my appetite was enormous. Days of skiing with Constantine Constantinovich gave me a fine colour which, in contrast with my white sweater, must have lent me the air of a normal, untroubled and contented boy.

A thousand candles lighted the dining room of Stockholm's Grand Hotel. Fountains flung up jets of various colours; red, green, and white columns rose and fell back in spray. Tables groaned with Swedish *smörgåsbord*; there were sleek attendants and carefree, well-bred patrons. In America, in the islands of the Caribbean, and on the shores of the Pacific, I later saw persons with a similar air of immunity to the horrors of war and revolution. The men were slow, massive; the women, beautiful, very blond and smiling, with white and perfect teeth. There were no drunks in the street. The stores were overflowing.



My mother, as in the Petersburg days, flung herself into the tide of luxury. All day uniformed messengers delivered huge parcels, carefully wrapped in excellent paper and tied with pretty blue, green or yellow ribbons. Our six rooms were a caravansery.

They bought me sports clothes with big pockets and warm woollen golf stockings. What I saw in the mirror had little connection with the ragged desperado who only a few months ago had fled from the dogs across the market-place. I felt a traitor to Mishka. My mother, the "washerwoman", was wearing a triple rope of pearls, and her picture with a tiara appeared in the *Svenska Dagbladet*. The supreme luxury of our being constantly bathed in admiration and sympathy made me feel guiltier than ever towards my old friends.

Meanwhile I was acquiring voluptuous impulses from reading the fiction of the boulevards. I tried to talk to the chambermaid when she came in her little white cap to make the bed. She blushed and I felt in myself a new warm glow. I took her hand and told her I was fifteen. My heart throbbed. If she were to scream—! But she smiled. The lamp was extinguished. We were on the bed. . . . But soon enough she discovered I was not fifteen, pushed me away and laughed. I was trembling with excitement and disappointment. The episode had definitely fallen short of my heated imaginings.

There was some trouble obtaining the visas needed to travel through Germany to Switzerland. Here again Uncle Spiridon came in handy. My parents were at odds. My mother was becoming more forceful and more assured and spent less time crying in her room. Once she took my hand and drew me to her. My little brother was yelling on the bed. Her proposal was to leave my father and take us with her. While my father would consent to her leaving, he categorically refused to part with his children. Thus we were still together when, some weeks later, we landed at Stettin. It had been a bad crossing; I had vomited constantly. But the last day was calmer and I had spent some hours in the captain's cabin examining his charts and nautical instruments and had scraped acquaintance with members of the crew and questioned them about Germany. Herr Doktor had given me some idea of his nation's contrasts, the mild melancholy of its Gothic villages, the hiss and whirr of its industries, the harshness of Prussian discipline, the sweetness and sentiment of its poets. But I had my own idea of the Germans, men with whom my father did business. Their pink necks rasped by starched collars and their bulging



waistcoats accented by gaudy watch chains thoroughly amused me.

There were ice drifts in the Baltic as we drew near Stettin. The railings were hung with icicles and the decks were a frozen waste. From my cabin I could hear the boat ramming the ice. And it made me think not of the warmth and comfort of the Grand Hotel, of visits to the opera, or Stockholm's sumptuous monuments, but of northern winters, nipping air, brief daylight, bare boughs. The icy exhalation from the Pole seemed the same wind that blew on the steppes, in the Russian forests among the snow-covered oaks and beeches. And always it revived a vision of bareheaded children extending their shivering hands for alms and a little hot broth. I turned my face to them: but the Arctic wind beat steadily towards the west.



## PART TWO

# GERMANY ON THE AUCTION BLOCK

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### CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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THE STIFF, shaven-necked customs inspectors wore impressive green uniforms, but their bellies were empty, and even punctilious politeness could not cover their pop-eyed admiration when, opening a hamper, they found it crammed with edible delicacies. There was famine in Germany in 1920. As we drove through Stettin, we drew hostile looks from the hollow-cheeked women waiting in long lines to buy horse meat. From the distance came the strains of a military band. "Verboten" signs were everywhere; it was forbidden to spit or, seemingly, to speak above a whisper.

Nevertheless, attempting to converse in German in the corridor of a railway car, bound for Berlin, I resorted so liberally to gestures that I thrust an elbow through a window pane. A railway employee got in a great fury about it. A pity he could not have seen how dilapidated our Russian coaches were then. A crowd collected, but I was rescued by the intervention of a polite fellow-traveller, who proved to be the son of Germany's first president, the former saddler, Friedrich Ebert. I introduced this important traveller to my parents and we finished the journey together. It was typical of the way we went everywhere, on a special footing because of my father's importance.

The common footing at this time was in many ways distressing. Pulling into the *Stettiner Bahnhof* in Berlin, we found the station ill-lighted, the city gloomy and cold. Its houses looked grey. Faces were tired and lined and people walked as though bent by a weight of mental oppression. The chambers of the Hotel Adlon had a mouldy smell. The doorman's sleeve was empty and he made shift with one arm. The lobby



swarmed with cigar-smoking gentry, the type that did business with my father, and there were always officers in English-tailored uniforms on the stairs, with portfolios under their arms. French, Belgian and English newspapers reported how the White armies were being driven back on all fronts.

The trees of Unter den Linden were stark and bare. In solitary rambles I mused on advertising signs with great letters recommending Mampe cognacs and Sarotti chocolates. Street-walkers collected by mid-afternoon at the corner of Friedrichstrasse to begin their hunt for customers who had either francs or pounds sterling. And there were beggars in decent clothes and spotless linen, extending soft immaculate hands; they looked hungry and forbidding and tagged along awkwardly as though new to their job. Stores were empty and bread queues crowded. French and German officers drove about together in big cars. Great trucks rumbled by with motionless, square-faced, steel-helmeted Reichswehr troops, resembling the robber knights of the Marienburg Order. We regaled ourselves at Kempinski's with raw oysters, white Rhine-wine in long-necked bottles and pheasants with truffles. The French commissioners had chic uniforms and my mother tendered them a banquet where toasts were drunk to France, England, America, the New Germany and the White armies.

When M. de Brissac of the French Armistice Commission, escorted by two soldiers, drove up to the hotel, his long-hooded Renault draped with French flags, the bystanders showed only a mild curiosity. Policemen in steel helmets were in evidence and there was a machine gun on a truck at the corner of Behrenstrasse. Everyone seemed tired and lethargic. An old woman wiped her eyes with a handkerchief. The famous Kapp *putsch* had just failed. Ehrhardt's brigades, made up of East Prussian Junkers, had triumphantly entered the city and, parading through the *Brandenburger Tor*, had seized power. They enjoyed themselves thoroughly for three days. The legitimate government had removed to Stuttgart, but the Berlin workers kept up the fight and a general strike put a stop to the farce. Though fighting still went on in the Ruhr, the republican forces won out. Kapp, General Lüttwitz, and Colonel Ehrhardt fled to Sweden; the Junkers withdrew to their vast estates. The Prussian reactionaries, the Krupps and Thyssens, had failed—but their power was not smashed and they could bide their time.

My father was busy all day with Dutch, Swedish and American colleagues. All seemed in high spirits. Bankrupt



Germany was being knocked down to the highest bidder and they were purchasing everything, from optical equipment to houses, lands and industries. Foreign money started a whirlwind of trading everywhere. Meanwhile, Russians thronged to my father, asking for money. He had a special secretary to deal with them. Apparently, he was helping many refugee families.

Then there was another set in town. They wore flowers in the lapels of their cut-away coats, and were referred to by Berliners as "*Verfluchte Ausländer*", God-damn foreigners. The hostility of this comment, overheard in the street, puzzled me, for these foreigners were gay and spent no end of money.

Uncle Spiridon blew in from Paris. He settled at our hotel and made the headwaiters step around. When the doorman spoke to him, he listened as patronizingly as the grand panjandrum. Uncle Spiridon dressed meticulously, never without a red carnation. The chappies with English accents again flocked around him. He was always buttonholing my father and explaining to him some fabulous new speculative or banking transaction. He had a huge Panhard-Levassor adorned with a Greek and French flag. One day he flung a five-franc note on the table for a tip. I appropriated it and exchanged it at a movie theatre for more banknotes than I had ever before held in my hands. Tremendous days followed; I saw Harry Piel in the "Headless Horseman" in twelve serial instalments. But Tom Mix was my favourite.

I was amused at the little schoolboys and students in their white, blue, and red caps; some had sabre-scarred cheeks. Large rats ran across the lawns of the Tiergarten. Carriages came and went at the French Embassy in the Pariser Platz. The iron-helmeted sentry outside was motionless as a statue. I came close to him and stared him in the face; he did not stir but kept his eyes inclined to the left.

Lying in my vast bed, looking up at the high ceiling and the crystal chandelier that cast yellow flecks of light round my room, I called up Russia before me as though in a motion picture. If only my comrades could have seen these streets, these boulevards, and Tom Mix!

A young German of rather formal manners walked with me one day in the Tiergarten and listened incredulously to my tales of Russia. He was sure I was exaggerating, but I convinced him when I felled a rat with a single, well-aimed stone.

"*Wunderbar!*" he exclaimed again and again, staring at me open-mouthed. "How extraordinary!"



His father, a professor of mathematics, had been killed in the Somme offensive. I visited his mother's apartment near the Tiergarten. She was tall, dressed in black, and wore a black and white ribbon at her throat. Likenesses of Wilhelm II with his upturned moustache pervaded the place. The "little Russian", as she called me, became a sensation in her circle; I was proud to have an audience for my anecdotes and laid it on thick. But her coffee parties ended for me the day I denounced the ex-Kaiser as "an ass and a quitter" who had no right to "do all that gassing, and then wind up planting tulips in Holland". They looked at me coldly and never asked me again.

I liked to be in the company of the officers of the Allied mission. My pride was flattered, for they were the victors and were nice to me and told me about great battles at Verdun, the Marne, and the Somme. Then there was a Scotsman in kilt, a great eater; once he took me to the Unter den Linden Café. We were a sensation. Everybody stared.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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ON THE LAST Christmas eve at our Brunspark villa at Helsingfors, the big Christmas tree with its thousand lights had abruptly and inexplicably toppled over. It was held to presage misfortune, perhaps a death in the family, and the season's festivities were ruined. On May 20 my father died after a short illness and an unsuccessful operation. He was under fifty.

The last time I saw him was at the clinic in Joachimsthalerstrasse. He had lost consciousness and recognized no one. I hardly knew him. He lay in bed, chalk-white, sunken-eyed, his hands cold. I knelt and bathed in hot tears the hand I had often dreaded. I had little time; my mother was waiting outside with some grave-visaged men bearing briefcases. The nurse led me to a little bench in the corridor. I do not know how long I



sat there. Men in white came and went and there was a strong smell of camphor.

Some days later my little brother and I were trudging slowly along beside my mother. She was dressed completely in black. Friends were dabbing their eyes. Some man praised my father as just, honourable, worthy and respected by all. When the coffin was lowered, my mother collapsed in hysterics. A doctor was summoned and the nervous shock kept her in bed for weeks. I was dry-eyed and exhausted and did not sleep for several nights.

• On our lot in the cemetery stood a blighted tree sculptured in marble, representing my father's life, broken off in its best years. A live tree, symbolizing immortality, was planted beside it. My brother George's German Fräulein Achilla often came there of a Sunday to bring flowers; she was religious, devoted to the family and, in the short time she was with us, had become attached to my father.

Beside the blighted tree stood a little bench, where I came to sit several times in later years. The tree grew steadily and I meditated on the tranquil atmosphere of suburban Berlin. In those years I came to understand my father better. He had not intended to be cruel. Our temperaments were so opposed that he could never understand his unruly son. He took recourse to harsh measures in the hope of beating some sense into my obstinate, disobedient head. He also misunderstood my mother, but he loved her in his way, with a queer, protective devotion which he extended to us children. They were often on the point of separating, but Father hesitated to abandon his guardianship over the frail blue-eyed woman, who saw the world through a rosy haze, and remained the sweet girl graduate that she had been when he met her in the years before the war.

Though my father had been robust, his energies had been sapped by the revolution and the nights he had spent in the cellars of the Cheka. In youth he had been for some years at Berne University and had hoped to return to Berne. As his family life was not happy, he looked back with special fondness to those university years of association with Russian comrades who were social reformers and democrats, many of whom were to help precipitate the fall of the monarchy and then go into exile after the October revolution.

The money he amassed during the war, when dizzy speculations quadrupled his capital, gave him no lasting satisfaction. He kept wishing to return to the bar and be a



simple lawyer again, for he loved and respected the profession and it was his life's chief aim and purpose. He fled to his study and his books from the social life that success imposed upon him. His dream, never to be realized, was to live in Switzerland, whose constitution and laws he so much admired.

We continued to live at the Adlon. Our life was sombre, sombre as Berlin itself, though it was now spring. My brother and I took long walks with his Fräulein. We walked down the Siegesallee, went to the Tiergarten and haunted the museums and art galleries. Often we went to the cathedral. Fräulein Achilla was a fervent Catholic and made us kneel beside her and say prayers. She would remain kneeling on the cold flagstones as though in a trance; she chanted the responses badly and sobbed as she intoned.

Fed up with war and reacting against suffering and privation, people now began living as though to make up for the four years of wretchedness. Berlin became brighter; each day a new light appeared. The city was gayer; red replaced blacks and greys. The night clubs stayed open late. The women put on lipstick and cosmetics. Paris fashions were imported. While crowds flung themselves into the whirlpool of the new life, cenotaphs to unknown soldiers were being erected and cripples were much in evidence. Returned soldiers did not find the same Germany they had left. The chaos of unhealthy peace succeeded that of war. Men smoking one-pfennig cigarettes thronged the streets and leaned on the bars that sprang up overnight. Their faces were empty and they drank beer interminably. The cycle of heavy industry was completed; after four years of smoking chimneys it had abdicated, given way to peace, pfennig cigarettes and unemployment.

My mother was very elegant in black; mourning became her. She often tempered it with violet, which was very pretty. Within a few months there was not much to point to our loss except the two little black bands on my sleeve and my brother's. As a widow, young, beautiful, elegant, and possessed of a considerable fortune, my mother was a magnet for all the gigolos in Berlin. Argentine dancers, Hungarian ex-officers, moving-picture actors and celebrated baritones sprang up around her like mushrooms. They sent flowers and left cards. Her parties in the hotel's grand salon swelled to mammoth proportions. My potential stepfathers were of all ranks,



professions, and nationalities, including a bearded Balkan diplomat, a slim and graceful Italian, a celebrated Russian, an American manufacturer and numerous speculators who came in big, chauffeur-driven Mercedes cars and who offered my mother advice on how best to invest her money. The moving-picture people were daily visitors; Emil Jannings, Hennie Porten, Runitsch, Ferrari and other post-war celebrities ate, drank, and passed their time at our apartments.

I abhorred especially the tango instructor who came daily; he had his hair plastered down and wore a purple coat with white stripes. When he kissed a hand he would linger over it and make an audible smack. My mother spent the greater part of her time at the fashionable Russian Emigrés' Club, which unquestionably had accepted her as its queen. There were games of baccarat, poker and roulette day and night, and large sums of money were raised for the underground work of the White organizations. Occasionally someone would sigh and recall his sad plight as an emigré. The elegant women had obviously managed to smuggle out plenty of diamonds and rubies, for champagne flowed and the play was for goodly stakes; a few thousand francs were nothing. The bancos mounted dizzily and necklaces and diamond rings rolled on the green cloth. Passers-by looked after the patrons leaving the club and muttered, "*Verfluchte Ausländer!*" For, besides their wealth, these foreigners dressed and painted so as to excite the envy of the frumpish German women.

In such surroundings my mother met the man who was to become my stepfather. He was perfectly tailored and had a handsome face with grey, languorous eyes. His name was famous. He was a movie actor. Every chambermaid in Russia had his picture stuck up on the wall. He was the idol of high school girls and sentimental cooks, pre-war Russia's equivalent of Rudolph Valentino. He had earlier been married to an actress, whose dramatic end had brought tears to the eyes of all fans. More persistent than the rest, this dashing cavalier cut out even the American industrialist who sent flowers by the basket. One day I learned that my mother was giving a banquet for a hundred guests. I was coming downstairs, drawn by cries of "*Viva!*", when a page-boy informed me that they were celebrating my mother's marriage to the actor. Furious, I rushed back to my room. I was amazed at my mother's choice. Even the bearded diplomat would have been better—or the American businessman, who might have taken me to the United States. But an actor! . . .



Mother left the next day for the Côte d'Azur and I did not see her again for some time.

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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MEANWHILE, my brother George's new lady-in-waiting was helping me out in algebra and teaching me piano. She bore an illustrious Georgian name, Countess Lyda S——, was thirty years old, dark-haired and brown-eyed, and had shapely hands with long nails. When she touched my fingers on the keyboard, I experienced a tremor. She was of medium height. Once I danced with her to the gramophone. She looked startled and pulled away from me. She must have hated my talk of Red Russia, since she called all my friends *canaille*. As she spoke the words, her eyes dilated and the pupils were those of an angry cat. She called me a silly fool when I looked at her instead of at my notes.

Early in June, 1922, we removed to the shore. Berlin was dead. The newspapers told of fresh disorders in Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony, and workers' insurrections in Italy. At Swinemünde some rusty torpedo boats reminded one that the little port had played a considerable part in the war as a naval base on the Baltic. The sea was magnificent; for the first time I viewed the ocean in all its splendour. The waves pounded; queer plants and shrubs clung to the dunes; the bracing air was salt and fishy. Fishermen spread their nets. The flounders were delicious. We often rode, galloping along the dunes to Heringsdorf and Ahlbeck.

One night a strong gusty wind beat on the windowpane. The sea was flawed with black. Great white waves rolled almost up to our hotel. Lyda was nervous and big-eyed. The storm had cut off the electricity. We lay on the bed reading Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne* by the light of a candle. My body was glowing from sunburn. We were so close that her breath stirred my hair. Sudden rain whipped against the



panes. Doors slammed in the hallways. A sharp gust thrust the window ajar and extinguished the candle. Her lips touched me. I was in a delirium and covered her with kisses. Next day I blushed, was embarrassed and did not go to lunch. She rode by under my balcony and gave me a mocking smile.

Hermann von Schlüter, captain of a training frigate, was living at our hotel-pension. He was tall and athletic and wore his hair cropped. His step was military and, even when he praised the food, you might think he was giving commands. He was from Königsberg, a complete example of the Junker. I disliked him deeply. Lyda did not share my dislike. They went out together for long walks or went dancing. I tore my pillow with rage and precocious jealousy. I liked to talk to Lyda about Hermann and exasperate her. I acted as messenger for them, arranging meetings, and then, leaving them alone, would suffer torments. When they were out of an evening, I counted the minutes till the scraping of the door relieved me of my misery. Lyda played with me, while she daily attached herself more to Hermann. If I came near her she pushed me off and called me a spoiled brat.

We all three went riding together one Sunday morning. The sky was blue. We were skirting the dunes. Lyda and Hermann rode side by side and I rode behind his black mare. I was riding Zeus, a powerful stallion with fine and well-muscled legs, who kept picking up his head to jump on the mare. We went into a gallop and I bent over the saddle, dug my spurs in, and flew past Hermann. As I passed him my spur struck his animal in the flank. We galloped off together, Zeus foaming at the bit. Hermann was a bad horseman. We had left Lyda far behind. My hate for the man swelled and swelled. My stallion was now behind him again and catching the scent of the mare. I loosed the reins. With a terrifying leap he was on the mare, his forehoofs beating the air. I saw Hermann fall.

He was brought back to the pension bleeding copiously and with all his proud elegance crumpled. Lyda looked at me with her strange catlike eyes. She must have hated me, for she understood perfectly.

For the rest of the summer I hardly spoke to her. Lyda and Hermann were much together, while I put in my time with the fishermen. They taught me how to spread nets; I went with them at dawn and returned late at night. I loved their harmonica playing and songs and smell of fish. One evening they took me with them to a little waterfront bar; they made me



drink beer and tell them about Russia. Many of them had been "coolies of the Kaiser" and had seen the German fleet shattered. One of them, Peter, who played the "ship's piano" and had fought in the Battle of Jutland, was among the first to raise the red flag at Kiel. I listened for hours to their stories; they spoke slowly, pausing when they raised their glasses to their lips. The pitch of their voices rarely varied. Their arms were tattooed and the skin round their eyes was like tanned leather.

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

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MY STEPFATHER had persuaded mother to produce pictures in which he should play the lead.

Every morning a big car drove my stepfather to the studios at Babelsberg—a medley of actors, production managers, American cameramen imported from Hollywood, and my mother, in the midst of it all. And all so polite. Once I was given a rôle in a film that had been shooting for three months instead of the four weeks which my stepfather had estimated. The director, Citizen Malikov, was the mirror image of a Cheka agent who had inspected the train going from Petersburg to Essentuki, the same droopy moustache and round shell-rimmed spectacles. Sometimes I felt an impulse to go up to him and inquire what he had been doing in the summer of 1918. And one day, taking my courage in both hands, I asked whether he had been a Chekist. It created a furore.

The director shook his megaphone; the shooting stopped and I expected to be discharged on the spot. All around me I heard exclamations: "*Unterschämtheit!* What nerve!" Leaving a crowd of excited extras in his path, the director ran to complain to my stepfather.

This Malikov, always making a fuss about nothing! The poor actors had to go back over their scenes a hundred times. They were costumed as Russian peasants; it was



August and the make-up ran in streams down their faces. The commissary was thronged with people, men and women strolling in pairs and often vanishing into dim passageways or among the painted canvas log huts. We were shooting scenes for "Psychée", a Russian subject, and most of the actors were Russian. For three billion marks a day, they were on call from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The stars were very rude and always came late. The leading lady refused to go on unless they would engage her fiancé as second lead. She was blonde and fortyish; he could have passed for twenty. The director ran around tearing out his few hairs, threatening to break the contract and abandon the picture. His lawyer talked plainly to Miss Gsovská, who claimed to be formerly of the Moscow Imperial Theatre, but she held out. Her fiancé wore a bored expression. My stepfather, in a Biedermeier tunic, was pouring himself cognacs in the canteen.

Meanwhile my mother signed cheques. Bales of banknotes were delivered every afternoon and two men counted the billions. At noon, two sausages and a glass of beer cost 28,000,000 marks; by evening, 40,000,000. The actors were overwrought and kept clearing their throats and getting on each other's nerves and refusing to return the next morning. One of them, garbed as a general and wearing Franz Joseph whiskers, invited them all for some vodka that he had made himself. In the pockets of his general's uniform, he had cucumbers, onions, and a little pot of home-made mustard.

For my rôle I was wearing high boots, a red shirt, voluminous trousers and a stringy red wig. This coarse contraption was ill-secured. The moment I entered the set, ten Jupiter lamps were turned full on my face. The wig began to slip down, then my trousers fell, and I forgot my routine. The Cheka-director made me do the scene half a dozen times. Hoarse and sweating, he finally begged that I might be removed from the set.

"Take him out, take him out!" he screamed like some savage beast. "He's already cost us quadrillions."

They brought in another young man more intelligent and more photogenic.

I spent the rest of the day in the canteen, listening to the anecdotes and dirty stories the extras bring to the studio every morning along with their little handbags. They tell them while they study themselves in their mirrors, put their hands to their throats, practise blood-curdling expressions, and sound their



high and low notes, "mi, do, re . . . fa, fa". "Toreador, ton cul n'est pas en or, Ni en argent, Mais en fer blanc!"—this variant I heard from a corpulent man of fifty as he patted one grease-painted cheek while the other still showed sallow and pouchy under the eye. A hunchback resembling Quasimodo got his pay from the office that evening and began counting the notes which were almost more than he could carry; then he uttered a hoarse yell and began tearing them up. The rest watched him tiredly. The fat barn-storming tenors in high heels were hungrily tightening their belts. The women were angling for dinner invitations from a camera technician or any higher-up whose pay was in dollars or francs that gained value hourly.

When these imported higher-ups ordered the German electricians about, you heard muttering and from time to time something about "*Ausländer! Polnische Schweine!*" At the end of the day the "*Ausländer*" went off in great cars with pretty extras, leaving trails of exhaust gas, to dine at Horcher's and Kempinski's. Strangely enough, the workmen took me into their confidence and soon I began to dislike these men stuffed with francs and dollars.

Once I thought of apprenticing myself to a camera technician, perhaps going to America, an enchanted land known to me through Tom Mix and Charlie Chaplin. But I had killed my chances by that unlucky debut at the studio. My stepfather's scorn knew no bounds when I turned in the trousers, boots and wig to the wardrobe. The fat creature at the counter gave me an odd look, put her head on one side and asked if I would be going to school and whether I would do as brilliantly there. On going home I sat jammed between my mother and my stepfather, a buffer in their argument. My mother kept saying that she would stop all disbursements if he took one more look at the little soubrette who was playing a chambermaid.

The outdoor scenes for "*Psychée*" were shot in the lovely peaceful countryside of the Harz Mountains. Here I improved my reputation as an actor. I played the rôle of a mounted courier.

We had hardly started shooting when the weather turned nasty. It rained constantly. The director seemed to age ten years; now he spoke very low and gently, as though he were an invalid: "Fourth scene—retake". It went on pouring. The villagers stared wide-eyed. They had never seen a foreigner before. Now men in Russian costumes and guardsmen's



uniforms of Catherine the Great's time strode through the crooked streets. Some exchanged autographs for food. The bread was of better quality than in Berlin and the sausage fresher.

The sky took pity at last on my mother's bank account and the rain stopped. Work was resumed. Miss Gsovská tired of her former admirer and made the director break his contract. Now a younger lover, with golden curls behind his too red ears, paraded around the village in the glittering uniform of a Cossack captain. He made tragic gestures on the set and pretended to be blasé in the canteen. Twice she boxed his rosy ears in public and then had hysterics. The village had not seen so much excitement since Napoleon's troops quartered there in the last century. The good citizens kept ejaculating, "How beautiful! These Russians! These uniforms!"

It was a quiet hamlet, the mayor a true democrat. The pharmacist had fought on the Eastern front and knew a few Russian words. His plump little blonde wife had spent two years during the war with her sister in Berlin and their apartment on Schlesiſcheſtrasse had been frequented by officers from both fronts. On returning, the pharmacist found himself the father of twins who in no way resembled him. The town had been outraged and tongues began wagging again now that our actors appeared in officers' tunics. The pharmacist covered his embarrassment with extravagant exclamations in bad Russian. His plump wife seemed intimidated; she hardly opened her mouth. But she hung hopefully about the Goldener Löwe Hotel. The twins at the pharmacy had big heads and unhealthy complexions and I would hear them screaming in the gloomy room behind the shop when I was sent to buy pyramidon for our prima donna's frequent migraines. . . .

The film was a complete flop. The papers denounced the acting, the directing, everything. It had cost my mother a fortune in pounds sterling. I felt the catastrophe deeply since I had taken half a dozen boys, with whom I had scraped acquaintance in the streets, to see the production. We all left after the first half to go and see Harry Piel in a crime picture. Later we picked up some girls and strolled in the Tiergarten. It had been drizzling, but I was oblivious to the wet benches: our girl friends, though they smelt of the kitchen, impressed me as exquisite. I began to steal flasks of chypre from my mother's dressing table or a pair of her stockings, to purchase a hearty reception from such sirens. They were often very tired and did not hide their yawns. Sometimes they brought



sandwiches carefully wrapped which I ate ravenously after making love.

I visited Wannsee. A crowd of hundreds of thousands of swimmers were spread out on the lake like sardines; there were vendors of sausage and cucumbers. Berliners relaxed on a beach littered with brown paper and bottles and steamy with the sweat of holiday-makers. After the bathing and the games, I remained on the empty beach with a big-boned girl. A beach patrol caught us at the most interesting moment, casting a ray of light on my naked bottom. We made a run for it, pursued by the guardians of public morals.

Weekdays I attended a private school without learning much. Stark's Privat Schule was an odd institution, of a sort that flourished after the war. One of the pupils was a big pimply fellow named Ernst, the same Obergruppenführer Ernst who was to win fame as a victim of the 1934 purge. I spent hours playing football and hockey and in cafés. As I worked very little, complaints about me were sent home, but no one there took any interest in my marks or studies.

Soon another film was in work, taken from a story of Gogol's, *Taras Bulba*. The cast ran to hundreds, including Cossacks and cavalry. I was one of the Cossacks. We all went to Munich. The outdoor scenes were shot at Grünewald near by. In my free time I watched a group of young people practise gliding; it looked like great fun and it never occurred to me, or to foreign diplomats either, that these flying associations were the nuclei of the famous German air force. Fifteen years later these blotchy youths in student caps were the pilots who brought the German army to the brink of victory.

The director did a lot of shouting; the Cossacks fought the Poles; I was taught the use of the sabre. A prominent member of the cast, Oskar Marion, had been a captain in the war and was a friend of the Commandant of the Munich Garrison, so we used Reichswehr horses. My mother fell ill and went to a sanatorium near Munich. The landscape was lovely—the Bavarian Alps in autumn with their yellow and red leaves.

When we returned to Berlin my mother was there. She glittered with high spirits and a remnant of the diamonds I had brought from Russia. I had never seen her so gay. She and her husband were living their own life completely.

My stepfather had disliked me from the first. Once I took advantage of a reception to ask for a few marks pocket money, for I wished to go out. I was refused and my stepfather called me a young idler corrupted by vagabondage and exile. He told me



to get out and stop pestering my mother, who was young enough to be my sister. I replied something in a nasty tone. . . . He struck me and I kicked him in the belly. We were at it tooth and nail when my mother came in.

We could not live together after that. Since Mother had married him and loved him, I was, naturally, the one to leave home. Our attorney, Mr. Müller, was commissioned to find a school for me remote from Berlin, the sort where young persons learn morals and respect for their elders.

I hated my stepfather, who looked at my mother so sweetly and at me with so much ill-will. I hated his short-fingered hands and curving nails. I hated all the persons who frequented our place, none of whom addressed a civil word to me, but made me feel I was nothing but a nuisance. All of them were on pleasure bent and I seemed to spoil their fun.

Eventually, Dr. Müller announced that he had found a place for me which my parents approved. I said good-bye to no one, except my little brother and his Fräulein.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

WE LEFT FROM the Anhalt station and went some three hundred kilometres from Berlin into Thuringia. Blankenburg, where we quitted the train, is in a region of tall pines, little streams and cascades. A fine rain was falling; it must have been storming some kilometres away. As the stopping train would not arrive before evening, Dr. Müller engaged a carriage. The landscape was magnificent. Following the impetuous course of the Schwarza River, which is flooded in the autumn but dry in the summer, we reached our destination as dusk was falling—a little town of old houses with pronounced Gothic overhangs and great black beams set off by white plaster. The church bells were ringing the Angelus.

The streets were narrow. The bakery and the White Horse Tavern bore the arms of the little Thuringian principality.



The pharmacy dated from 1685. An eerie quiet prevailed.

The town lay at the foot of a hill. My school was at the top; one could see it perched up there like the fortress of some robber baron. The last rays of the setting sun revealed dreary grey buildings surrounding it like barracks. Our panting horse climbed and climbed. Big black Gothic characters on a white ground informed us that we had arrived at the educational establishment of Headmaster Peters, devoted to the physical and moral betterment of youth.

We entered the headmaster's study. He wore a black moustache in the fashion of Wilhelm II. His head was square, his hair and skin dark; two great scars, one between the eyes, the other reaching from cheek to chin, made his face seem stern and forceful. He sat in a big armchair behind a table heaped with books. Two great Danes lay at his feet, their red tongues hanging from slaving jaws. The walls were covered with hunting rifles, mounted rams' heads and swords of different periods. Two crossed halberds supported arms, representing a plumed and visored helmet with a swan on a red and black field. Under glass were geological specimens and collections of butterflies, moths, and beetles. Between the two great Gothic windows with their small panes of many colours hung a Beauvais tapestry, representing a wolf hunt; about twenty pistols were nailed to it.

Herr Peters wore a jacket of pin-striped maroon velveteen and a great ring with which he beat a tattoo on the heavy oak desk before him. He had been a Colonial officer and had spent his youth in German East Africa. Portraits of Bismarck and the various Wilhelms hung everywhere in his institution. I was briefly introduced by our attorney, Mr. Müller, who, with endless heel-clicking and *jawohls*, recommended the harshest discipline—and then rushed off to catch his train. I was presented to some young fellows in the reading room and to my proctor, Böttcher, a huge fellow of six feet five wearing cavalry boots and a brown shirt. His hair was cropped and his speech was an ill-tempered growl. Later when I saw him functioning as an educator I felt justified at the odd feeling I experienced when first I met him.

"A new boy. Let's give him the works!"

The students had hungry faces, sunken cheeks and bellies and an air of wolfish expectancy. I was grabbed and tossed in the air many times. I went up and came down on the arms of my new comrades. Everything spun around me when I was set on my feet. A jug of water was poured over my head. Then



I had to kneel. Someone made a speech. All I grasped was that I was being given the Wolf's baptism in the name of St. Swinery.

"To your beds!" intervened the voice of the booted giant.

I hardly slept that first night. Thirty beds were ranged against the wall of the low-ceilinged dormitory. The tall proctor slept at the farther end and snored unpleasantly. When the snoring started, the boys began visiting each other's beds; when it stopped, they returned quickly to their places and feigned slumber. That night I saw Böttcher drag a small German boy from bed with his legs still drawn up and smash him full in the face for masturbating. We were not allowed to urinate at night but forced to wait till morning.

The day began at 4.30 when the quondam sergeant-major shouted, "*Heraus! All out!*" in a voice of thunder. Boots were polished at 4.40. No matter what the season, we had to scrub all over in glacial water. There were two hundred inmates in this concentration camp for the young. Like me, many had no fathers or were quite alone in the world. Complaints brought redoubled whippings. In the morning, Böttcher inspected buttons and buttonholes while we stood barefoot with our shoes in our hands. Woe to him who had a button missing or loose. The penalty for the bigger boys was blows and fasting till noon; the smaller ones were whipped.

The headmaster's room was a torture chamber, from which dreadful howls might be heard any hour of the day. Lads came away nursing their scorching bottoms. Sometimes they had to be carried to their beds. If they fainted from pain, Ebbe, the headmaster's young daughter, would bring iodine and a compress.

Schultz's bottom was in tatters. He was my left-hand neighbour and was beaten systematically for lying. While whipping him, the headmaster made him sing a senseless little nursery rhyme to accompany the blows:

*"Fitze, Fitze, Domine—  
Tut die ganze Woche, weh!"*

Schultz would often repeat these verses in his sleep.

One day Böttcher booted Wrede, a boy in my form, full in the stomach, because at the second stroke of the bell he was not yet in place, chest expanded, head back, eyes to the left. They made us march in goosetstep for hours round the court; it was our exercise before breakfast at 5.15 and after the evening meal. We were forbidden to speak, forbidden to make complaint—*verboten, verboten!* How often I wished I had some of my



homeless Russian boys to make a shambles of this inferno! Our letters were censored; the postmaster, like all the officials at the railway station, was a friend of the Oberlehrer. Escape was difficult. Those who tried it were trailed by the great Danes.

There were only three foreigners enrolled. Candolini, an Italian whom we called "Bambino" for no good reason, was a pink-cheeked boy of fourteen. He revolted against everything and everybody; two years at the institution had confirmed him in the habit. His father was divorced and lived at a hotel in Friedrichstrasse; he was the agent for some Italian film company. Little Elias was a thin, gentle lad. I never understood how his parents came to send him there. He was a Lithuanian Jew from Kaunas. His features were pronouncedly Semitic and he had to bear the brunt of all the students' and the teachers' anti-Semitism. I was the third foreigner and they nicknamed me "Panie". The proctor fastened the name upon me and it was generally taken up despite my protests. I could never make plain the distinction between Russia and Poland. The epithet was meant to remind me that I was a Russo-Polish swine.

I clenched my teeth obstinately and wrote nothing home. What saved me was my muscle, my knowing how to lie in season and some parcels of food that Fräulein Achilla sent me from time to time. The arrival of such a parcel was a tremendous event, wiping from recollection all the blows, ignominies and hatred. I pounced on the square yellow carton, untied the string and submitted the package for inspection. Fifty per cent. went to the institution for general use. I saw the professors stuffing themselves with my sausage and ham. But the rest was for me. I leapt famished upon the white bread, the pot of lard and ham, under the greedy eyes of my mates. Sometimes I fled to town with the parcel. In Lämmerzahl's tavern I deliberately spread out the contents on the counter, chose what I wanted and left enough with Lämmerzahl to nourish me till the next box came. Then I returned to school whistling the "Fredericus Rex" march. My future for the next two weeks was assured.

The school was divided into forms, known as the Foxes, Wolves, Bears, and Lions. The larger beat the smaller, and, of course, a Fox had to shine a Wolf's shoes, since he was in the fourth form, whereas a Bear, if he wished, could cuff a Wolf for no reason at all. A Lion could rob a Wolf's plate and the latter couldn't grumble. The Lions were allowed to go down to the



village after dinner and return about ten o'clock; they were sixteen to nineteen years old, grown men, and they visited women in town. The Bears held the candle for their ablutions and the Wolves masturbated. At fourteen, I should have been a Bear, but being behind with my studies, I was placed with the Wolves. I had trouble keeping up even with the Foxes.

My authority was established in my form when I thrashed the best football player in school so thoroughly that he was not seen for some days. His father, the village baker, came and complained. At the close of the evening meal, which consisted of thin lentil soup, potatoes with an indescribable sauce and malt coffee, a nauseating imitation, the Headmaster tapped with his dreadful ring on a plate and read the names of those to be called up on the carpet. When mine was read everyone looked at me. There would be a showdown, for my prowess and adventures were known. I was a Wolf and Wolves were whipped, but I was older than the average in my group.

When I entered the study, the Oberlehrer had his cane in hand. He bade me close the windows and stretch myself over a chair.

Blood rushed to my face and I refused. He struck me in the face. I was nearly as tall as he was. What actually scared me was not the headmaster, but the two great Danes who lay licking their enormous paws. Nevertheless, I fought back. He cried, "Help!" Böttcher and two of the Lions, Messerschmidt and Kunz, came in and tried to pinion me. I defended myself fiercely, using all the shifts learned on the steppe. Halberds, stuffed deer heads and insect collections flew around the room, accompanied by cries of "Russian devil! Just wait!"

I spent three days locked in the cellar. Rats cavorted over my chest. Little Wrede managed to throw me some morsels of bread and marmalade through a small vent near the ceiling. When I came out I was ill for a week and decided to run away at the first opportunity.

Our days were hard. They made us work in the fields and gardens, set up barbed wire round new potato fields, assist in brick-laying, and carry heavy rocks to build roads. We worked with our hands for five or six hours a day. The proctor would pass with a switch in his hand and take casual flicks at our behinds. "*Faulenzer! Los arbeiten!*—Get going, lazy bones!"

Village boys attended our classes. These hours were my only moments of respite. I loved the little schoolhouse from



which you could see the town below, with its pleasant market-place, old burghers' houses and a tourist inn, where folk came and went who led a normal existence. In winter there were smartly clad persons in white sweaters who went skiing. For them this was the romantic Schwarza Valley. . . .

At this time, every town had its own currency. It took a good many of the little pictures called banknotes to purchase a pound of bread. I had a collection of three hundred different kinds. Every Saturday we were turned out to pasture, as it was called; in other words, we foraged and stole from the peasants. We could go in groups of three or four, returning Sunday night. This saved the school feeding us. Often we returned black and blue, having been caught robbing a fruit tree or a hen-roost.

In summer we camped in the woods and fields, sleeping under the stars; in winter we stayed at inns for a few marks—"Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust—das Wa-andern!" With ruck-sacks, leather breeches and Bavarian suspenders, we tramped and sang. On all sides were plum trees. We had plum soup, plum jam, plum dumplings, and we suffered chronic diarrhoea from the excess of plums and apples. The town lads were more fortunate. They got plenty to eat. They brought thick sandwiches of ham and liverwurst to class. We watched them chew, following every movement of their jaws, and we did their algebra and geometry problems in return for their leavings.

Every week there were excursions, or rather forced marches, to places like the Trippstein, the Ingelklippe, and the Griesbach cliffs. Every second week there were war games to prepare the future generations of Grossdeutschland. They divided us into Whites and Reds, each having its own command and staff. Armed with sticks, we crawled hundreds of yards on our bellies, approached the enemy and attacked. Four of the masters, as excited as we, decided after a long conference who had won. The manoeuvres often lasted till late into the night. We would come back by torchlight lustily singing old Prussian songs or "*Deutschland über alles*". We were rewarded with thin marmalade sandwiches and malzkaffee. Sunday nights there were stale cookies and we gathered around the piano; the headmaster's daughter, Ebbe, played and we sang sentimental songs.

Often there were special lectures after dinner for the older boys about Germany's greatness and triumphs. A special master taught strategy. The physical-culture teacher put us through endless knee-bends till our muscles ached. In early



spring we had to dive from a rock into the Schwarza River. Those who could not swim were simply thrown into the icy water. They were seized hands and feet and swung—"one, two, three—go!" The wretches thrashed like drowning animals. Their teeth chattered and they were green with cold and fright. But in they went, again and again. Here, too, was the pervasive note of sadism, which ran from the headmaster down to the smallest, palest Fox in the dormitory. I once saw a little eight-year-old tearing the wings from a bird—his eyes were shining. When I explained to him that it was bad, he giggled and fled calling me a "dirty Pole".

Hog-killing was a special fete. Hogs were killed twice a year. Their blood flowed into wooden troughs and was used for blood sausage. The headmaster got ham, of course, and soap, and the bristles were used for brushes. The Oberlehrer, in his shirt sleeves, came in person and started things off by thrusting a big knife into a squealing animal. These pigs were precious. Once one fell into the well and, although half eaten by rats, was served to us on Sunday. Next day there were no classes. Everyone was retching and groaning.

The headmaster exercised the despotic power of a feudal prince. He referred to officials in the ministry of education at Berlin as "Republican swine" and surrounded himself with the future torch-bearers of the doctrine of German ruthlessness. Ten years before the triumph of National Socialism the regimen of the concentration camp was in effect at that school, cloaked in such words as obedience, respect for elders and love of country. It was a perfect build-up for the Third Reich. Many of my rachitic, bow-legged, blotchy-skinned schoolmates later became the leaders of assault detachments; I was to find their names and citations in the *Völkischer Beobachter* and see them parade in their faultless SS and SA uniforms on the Kurfürstendamm.



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

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ONE DAY THERE was a new arrival at school. He was dressed in an immaculate grey jacket and wore spectacles. Though frightened to the point of tears by the crowd that surrounded him, he tried to answer their questions and yammered chokingly that he was Erwin Simonsohn from Berlin. A merchant's son.

"Simonsohn?" yelled the crowd. "A Jew?"

"A Jew," said the lad, staring down at his well-polished shoes.

"Was your father at the front?"

"No."

"Aha! Like all the Yids!" roared big Max, who was especially aggressive and nasty.

Encouraged by the boy's faint and fearful replies, in days to come the cross-questioners evolved ingenious and delightful torments. They put lizards and snakes in Simonsohn's bed, dirtied his clothing and wrote "Jew", "Son of a Jew", and "Moneylender Simonsohn" on his notebooks and clothes. One day in the gymnasium they made him climb onto a platform twelve feet high. Gathering around the base of the structure, they chorused, "Jump, Simonsohn, jump! Show us the Jews aren't afraid!"

Simonsohn jumped and fell to his knees. They made him climb up again. His clothes were torn; the climbing and falls became a ghastly repetition. His schoolmates danced around, hating and despising him. He was a Jew—and his father had not fought in the war. A Galician Jew—then he must have been a Berlin profiteer. "*Hep, hep der Jude!*" resounded through the halls.

Simonsohn was persecuted by both students and masters. They kicked him, knocked him down, broke his spectacles. He was near-sighted and could not see without them. Once he flew into a rage and revolted against this injustice. He charged his persecutors with his head down, grabbed big Max and shook him, howling like a savage beast. With an angry roar the giant



Behrisch rushed in. "Aha, the Jew brat again!" He swung his fists, then seized the boy by the collar. Blows clacked upon his poor face. Then he dragged him on his knees across the court, skinning his hands and tearing his clothes.

Beside himself, Simonsohn bit Böttcher's hand. There were more fiendish yells. Böttcher dragged him into the Oberlehrer's study. There he was given a caning. I saw him several days later. He could hardly walk, his buttocks were so swollen. Some time later he ran away. Tracked by the proctor and the dogs, he was brought back and cruelly beaten. He wept with rage; the daily canings made him a savage outcast.

Böttcher's blows would fell an ox and he kept his worst ones for Simonsohn. This continual mistreatment preyed on my mind. I smuggled out a letter to Simonsohn's father and suggested removing him from school. One day he came—a round little man in a bowler hat who crossed the court leading Simonsohn by the hand. The students looked on scornfully. . . . Simonsohn's life ended as tragically as it began. Fourteen years later he died in a concentration camp at the hands of some of the same men who had tormented him at school.

Dr. Scholle was my professor of history and German. One part of his face had been demolished by shrapnel. Instead of a left eye he had a hideous hole which he did not bother to cover, except occasionally with a black band. He had also lost part of the left temple. His right eye was ferocious and inquisitory; it took in everything. Pointed nose. Wide mouth, with thin lips. Deep lines traversed his cheeks. I never saw him smile. Whenever possible he dealt out punishment, with surprising agility. Mornings when he came in, he made us say the *Our Father*. Then we had to sit down and get up ten times. "Sit, rise. Sit, rise. Faster, you rascals!" He wore service ribbons on his tight coat, and a white tie with the iron cross, first class. The coat—it was always the same one—was shiny all over but impeccably clean . . .

"Well, Panie, shoes aren't shined, eh? Are you a pig, a Frenchman, or a wretched Pole? A lazy Russian, aren't you?" Loud laughter from the class. "No yelping there. You!" He grabbed the nearest boy by the tip of his ear, cuffed him and sent him sprawling into a corner. His arms were powerful; he rarely used a stick.

One day during the rest period, when I was devouring marmalade sandwiches, Dr. Scholle took me by the arm and asked if I was unhappy at school.



"When people are unhappy, Panie, one must look into the depths of things, the depths, you understand. After all, you are merely the product of a post-Versailles world—the twentieth-century Rome—rotten to the core. But all this will change. Once before, in the fifth century, our German ancestors conquered Rome, the powerful, the corrupt. . . . A civilization died! Centuries passed. . . .

"Remember, Panie, our present civilization will be re-organized by a new socialism—a German socialism. . . . The worst, the most destructive, ideas of Christianity were and are equality, internationalism, and an imaginary moral superiority of poverty over wealth. Christianity cannot build. . . ." His voice became hoarse and his eye fairly bored into me. "Christianity—a mockery! It offers nothing, even in heaven!

"Even pagan Rome had order, but the Christians brought internal disintegration long before *die Germanen* toppled everything down.

"For centuries, Europe was plunged into night, all because Christianity could not organize the work of human society.

"But the religion of work will be introduced by us in another cataclysm, a 'barbarian' invasion that will destroy a second demoralized Rome. This time it will be modern German organization, a strong, bloody Socialism incubated in the Northern forests. Who knows? Perhaps the time is near."

Dr. Scholle stared over my head into the distance. . . . Classes had begun and the corridors were empty. We were alone together. His voice sounded firm and prophetic, as he spoke these final sentences: "Mysticism of the German forests! Primordial desire to destroy Rome. Rome of the fifth, and Rome of the twentieth century! Our sun will rise vast and powerful, Panie. We shall soon see Europe and her culture delivered from the chains of Versailles! The masses, the organization of labour—that's what they forgot in Versailles."

He chuckled. His eye was hideous.

"Us, we know how to organize! Kill the morbid destructive individualism of the West, with its delicacy, its levity! We Germans get up early, and find our supreme happiness in work! . . . Take work from us and we are mere walking corpses. And don't think we don't understand the machinations of the modern Rome! We shall stretch out our hands first to the West—then to the East. There's our future, Panie, in your country!"

Years later, when I visited Munich briefly, he was holding



an important post in the Ministry of the Interior, assisting Dr. Frick. This conversation occurred at the very commencement of the Weimar Republic, a democracy built on sand. The dream of a powerful, disciplined, avenging nation was thriving in the provinces even while Berlin was toasting Franco-German friendship, world amity, and the League of Nations.

A man in prison—hated, hunted, and disillusioned—committed to paper such vague, ill-formulated ideas. National Socialism was coming to birth in the medieval German towns. Beware, modern Romans, sitting at your tables on the Paris boulevards, in hotel lobbies at Geneva, in the antechambers of guileful old diplomats! The laurels of victory can fade.

Dr. Scholle's history lessons fascinated me. I was often the last to leave his class and would sometimes accompany him to a small house on the hill, where he lived with an old serving woman. He told me about ancient Athens, Babylon, Alexander the Great; he described Hannibal, just as I had pictured him. Scipio Africanus became monumental in his narratives, and Alaric magnificent.

Sometimes I called on him after supper and we took walks in the neighbouring woods. Once he picked up an adder and crushed its head with his dry fingers, then showed me the poison fangs. Sometimes, he asked me to tell him about Russia, its vast rivers, its steppes, the herds of horses led to water, the gypsies singing and playing guitars around fires. Then his features would relax and he interrupted only with sincere and naïve exclamations of wonder.

Dr. Dietz, my mathematics teacher, often came to see him. My relations with him were stiff and formal, as I had no talent for the sciences. He regarded me as ignorant and worthless. His pinched face with blue shaven jaws was a chequerboard of sabre scars. He and Dr. Scholle had spent the greater part of the War together until Dr. Scholle was wounded at Ypres. Almost all the teachers bore scars. Dr. Bodenstängel, a jolly Bavarian, had been wounded in the groin and genitals. It made him the butt of many jests, which he endured patiently. He had an agreeable voice and spoke with the broad Bavarian accent. The three belonged to the same fencing fraternity and before the War were members of the faculty at Heidelberg. All of them were pained by conditions in Germany and each was sadistic and hysterical.

If Dr. Scholle had a rival in hysteria, it was surely Dr. Dietz. He had been gassed in the War, and often talked of the Western



front and Flanders. He hated the Allies from the depths of his soul and had been forcibly prevented from shooting himself when the Armistice was signed. He was ordinarius of the third form; instead of the morning prayer he led in chorus: "The French and the English are dirty swine, and the Italians double-crossers! Sit down." After a few beers he would speak with similar contempt of Ebert, Scheidemann, and other officials of the German Republic, winding up by calling them Jews. The mention of Marx or Bolshevism maddened him. He never forgave me for being Russian. The Russians, Poles, and Americans, along with the rest of the non-German world, were lazy, filthy, barbarians and pigs. Once he forgot himself and struck my hand with his cane. When he raised his stick for a second stroke, I dodged the blow and his cane broke on the desk beside me. Blood rushed to his face and I thought he would burst. His eyes stood out from their sockets. He began coughing and turned purple. I feared he was having a stroke. But it was only rage. Dietz looked impotently at the shattered cane. From that day he hated me with all his overwrought, ill-tempered soul.

*"Faule Hunde! Mistkerle! Vieh! I'll show you! . . . Whine, whine. About what? A good licking! . . . Flat on your bellies. Get up. Now down again. That's a hundred and fifty. Three hundred more to go, you asses! I'll teach you to complain. Donnerwetter noch einmal!"*

Böttcher panted but roared on . . .

It was about five o'clock, but already night. We were virtually unconscious and went through the prescribed motions as in a trance. Little Meyer, a Wolf, had written a complaint home. By a miracle his letter had gone through and been published in a newspaper in Halle. The headmaster was disturbed and the proctor had been told to take some lessons in anatomy and in the future try not to fracture skulls or break bones in the course of his discipline. After all, there were plenty of flesh-covered areas from which black-and-blue spots vanished in a few days. Meyer had dreadful headaches; he had been knocked across the room and had lost consciousness.

They were tightening down on us all. The free hour after lunch was suspended and instead they made us march double-file. The privilege of writing home was suspended also, for four weeks. Sunday morning chocolate was superseded by a brew they called tea. The sweetened white bread known as cake was replaced by black bread. I had to learn three pages of Schiller



by heart, a whole ballad. The temper of the place was as bad as could be imagined, but was sure to grow worse, for it was known that Ebbe, the headmaster's daughter, was pregnant.

Ebbe was sixteen, had long braids of flaxen hair and an expressionless face. She was lazy and loose-tongued. As her dirndl dress swelled, she spent hours in her father's study, and was finally driven by blows and promises to name four of the Lions as possibly responsible. The headmaster's fury baffled description. The whole town talked of it. Dismissals and mass penalties were expected. Luckily, Ebbe had named no Wolves, though two of us had enjoyed the favours that she lavished in various hiding places about the grounds. Meanwhile, we boys stood in line outside the headmaster's study, waiting to be whipped for any trifling offence—upsetting a glass, reciting a poem badly, or having spots on our trousers.

At this time I was religious and superstitious. I spent hours in town at the little Lutheran church during week-days, and my Sundays with monks at Paulenzella, a medieval ruined abbey not far distant. My friend Hans Gerhardt took shameful advantage of my superstitions. Always hungry, he found a thousand pretexts for extorting an orange from me or a quarter of a sausage. He had a lively imagination and could easily persuade me that any natural phenomenon was a special sign from heaven. When a black cat crossed my path, endangering my very life, Gerhardt would exorcise the spirit—for the price of two cookies. He had inside dope from the spirits whenever danger loomed. To avoid disaster there was only one way out—appease Hans Gerhardt, the middleman.

His mother, a stage actress who was completely neurotic, wrote him letters that smelt of cocaine and the forecourts of bedlam.

Gerhardt's charlatanism operated with nearly faultless efficiency as far as the Foxes were concerned. They would surrender their last package of food to him. He would hold forth on Germanic rituals and the science of runes and on special occasions would fall into an ecstasy from which, however, he would promptly re-emerge if offered a fat liver-wurst sandwich.

One day he and I were caught in a severe snowstorm in the Thuringian forest between Schwarzburg and Blankenburg. Gerhardt fell on his knees and began invoking the spirits. I had to promise him half of my next parcel of food to "appease the elementals" before he would rise and resume our walk.



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

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WALKING IN THE COURT with a copy of Virgil under my arm, I heard cries and general excitement among the Bears, heralding the arrival of a new pupil. This chap was big, at least sixteen, and was bearded and hairy. He wore long trousers and a coat of the latest cut. He rolled his *r*'s as I did and had trouble expressing himself. He was instantly surrounded by a lot of little Fritzes. The newcomer had an air of decision. He thrust back the mob, using oaths familiar to me: for in short he was a Russian. His name was Kyril. We were inseparable from the first. We would go off together whenever we had a chance and talk endlessly of our experiences and ambitions. Though he was older, we understood each other perfectly.

Kyril had left Russia only a few months before. His father was employed by the Derutra, a Russo-German trading organization, and was representing the Soviet Union commercially in Germany. Kyril was a native of stern Siberia and did not relish the other boys' fooleries. When they tried to baptize him with "holy water", as they called it, he polished off two of them in a way to be remembered.

The professors were at a loss how to handle him, for he was only half a head shorter than Böttcher, and, in the first hour of arrival, he announced in mixed German and Russian that he would return blow for blow. One day both of us arrived late at clothing inspection. Böttcher took me by the collar and shook me roughly. Kyril glared at him with his black eyes under shaggy brows. There was bound to be serious trouble between these two.

One day Kyril entered the dining room just as the proctor had little Elias by the ear and was twisting it savagely. "I'll teach you, you circumcised Lithuanian!" The frightened small boy was crying and trying to defend himself with one hand when Böttcher dealt him a blow that shot him under the table.

Kyril came just in time to see that. With a generous fury that reminded me of Mishka, he leaped upon the proctor.



Kyryl was very strong and had the powerful hands of a Siberian lumberjack. They fought their way onto the stairs and into the court. There was general horror at the spectacle of a pupil resisting his master. It was something new for Germans accustomed to discipline. But the joy was equivalent to the shock when Böttcher withdrew to his room with a nose-bleed, trembling with rage. Kyryl would be dismissed. The headmaster declared he would have him handcuffed and put into solitary confinement. But Kyryl said the first person who touched him would get a broken head. It was magnificent, heroic! Everybody developed a deep respect for the heavy-fisted Russian.

Candolini, Kyryl and I decided to leave school. After the fight with Böttcher conditions became unendurable. Discipline was shattered. The masters were beginning to hate us. Even Dr. Scholle ceased inviting me to his house. The teachers' collegium announced that a revolutionary flood had inundated the school, where the prerogative of age had always before been respected. There was an epidemic of students running away. Some never came back from their Sunday excursions. Others were hunted with a posse including some of the Lions, who received a few thousand inflation marks for each capture. Supported by the masters, dogs and forest guards, they conducted big-game hunts in the woods. Spies were posted at railway stations. Those caught were whipped with a seven-tailed cat. One day I saw the proctor stripped to the waist, raining blows on a boy we called Six-Shooter, on account of his flow of words. The boy was fastened to a table. Böttcher had grabbed him at Blankenburg just as he was boarding a train for Halle. Now he was whipped daily. He spent most of his time in the hospital trying to patch up his torn buttocks, from which the skin hung in shreds. Böttcher sweated upon such occasions; he was very serious, did his work conscientiously and reported on it to the headmaster.

I began to hate this profoundly cruel atmosphere. One day Kyryl, Bambino and I celebrated my birthday in the village. The three of us polished off a bottle of egg cognac with beer chasers and Bratwurst with potato salad. Kyryl and I were in great good spirits. The escape was resolved upon.

We returned late that night. As we climbed the stairs we met Fräulein Hedwig, the housekeeper. She was just leaving the rooms of the Lions. A forty-year-old sexual maniac, she spent her nights cavorting from one room to another, neglecting neither students nor masters. Kyryl and I were feeling



high and cornered her in the hallway. Kyril pulled her down on the stairs. It was midnight, everyone was asleep and the big house was quiet. By then the combination of beer and cognac made itself felt and I went to vomit in the stone-floored toilet. As there was no light, the boys urinated anywhere and you had to walk on your toes to avoid the muck. Since I had come in last, I would have to clean up the place next day. As for Bambino, he stayed behind with a village belle and anxiously awaited the developments of the next three days. Would it be the clap?

For some months I had had almost no news of my mother; she was travelling somewhere. Before my birthday, the attorney had sent me money, cautioning me not to spend it foolishly. What a washout the celebration had been!

Kyril did not come down at the summons in the morning. He slept. He did not even explain his reasons for the tardy return of last night. He answered in Russian as though he was talking to ants. The same day Kyril worked out details of an escape. He tried to persuade me to go with him. We would return to Berlin and live at his house. His father was a kindly man and had placed him in school only to study German. For myself, I knew I could not return home and live under the same roof as my coxcomb of a stepfather. Perhaps I could get to Paris and find my aunt and attend the Lycée with my cousin, Gregory.

The school was a jail. Germany was repugnant to me. All were harbouring the same obsession, the director, the professors, the officials of the town; they lived only for vengeance. Should I go back to the Berlin crowd who were living in a dream, an atmosphere that was selfish and extravagant, even bacchanalian, or stay here and become like all these young persons in the lower second form, brutes cuffing the smaller ones and each shouting, "*Deutschland über alles!*" louder than all the rest? Trying to arrive at a solution of my problems, I moved pensively down a corridor . . .

"Boor!" It exploded right next to me. The headmaster was passing by. Deep in thought, I had neglected to greet him. Too late I assumed a military attitude and stuck out my chest.

"*Jawohl, Herr Direktor.*"

"Pretending not to see your superiors! Anarchy in your blood! May I remind you that we're not in Russia, Panie?"

I was used to physical oppression, but the sarcasm of the German *Oberlehrer* was unbearable. His irony fixed my resolution. Escape at all costs.



As a wild boy in Russia, I had been like a starved dog fighting over a scrap of meat or foul bread. But in Russia at least there had been none of this *systematic* bad feeling; there was not that atrocious nickname, Panie, or whistles blown every hour or heel-clicking. Liberty—that was it. I began to grasp what the word implied. I thought of my uncle's description of the "free life of students in France". My decision was made. On to Paris! Recklessly whistling the "Marseillaise", I walked down the hall.

"Hey, what's the idea whistling that?" asked Kurt Moser, one of the Bears, a notorious mischief-maker. "You can't whistle the 'Marseillaise' in here!"

In a fit of anger I struck him hard in his spying and informing face.

"Take that, you rat! Now go and report it. And this, and this, too."

His books crashed to the floor and he covered his abject face with his hands.

The consequences might have been unfortunate for me. Luckily Moser had no one to complain to. That night Böttcher, Dietz and the Headmaster with his dogs had set forth. The dogs were famished and bayed savagely. The three men were dressed in leather jackets and leggings and had their hunting rifles. It was the season for wild boar. But we knew that Schultz and Fersen had not been seen since morning, and the hunt had a double purpose. The headmaster was worried. If Schultz got away he had evidence to show, a lacerated back; he had been whipped savagely. Schultz's parents lived in Sulza. He would have to cross the forest; they would surely catch him there.

The headmaster's wife had handed out neatly wrapped sandwiches. From her tight lips came the usual "God go with you". Then they had disappeared into the darkness. Long after, I heard their outlandish clamour as they went down the steps, to the accompaniment of Böttcher's thundering dialectic. . . .

Some hours later, when the last light had been extinguished except that in Fräulein Hedwig's mansard window, Kyril and I leaped the wall, cut through the barbed wire that had lately been strung around the grim school premises. At the last minute Candolini had got cold feet. His father was travelling and he would have no place to go. Besides, the expected had come. Poor Bambino had the clap. He could hardly walk, let alone run.



I cast a final glance toward the hill, the village, the school with its teachers, the little Lutheran church with those stone seats so icy of a Sunday morning in winter, from which I had heard the pastor's tirades and occasionally Dr. Scholle's new political evangel. The streets were dim. Near the mill where we often fished for trout, we entered the forest, which was alive with nocturnal noises. We must hurry and avoid any encounter with the game wardens. We carefully skirted their fires. There was a train leaving Rudolstadt at 6 a.m. We must get on that train before the *Oberlehrer* should discover our absence.

Kyril was strong. I was well acquainted with the region. We walked without speaking. Startled deer crossed our path. The Schweizerhaus, a tourist inn, was now on our right. The game warden's windows were lighted. Walking through a dense pine forest, I remembered my flight in Finland. The pines were like those that stood over Savoonen's grave.

We arrived in Rudolstadt exhausted, a few minutes before train time. The station master whistled three times and the train got in motion. I was tired and apprehensive, doubtless a reaction from the excitement and exertion. Kyril and I huddled in a corner of our fourth-class compartment. After sharing an apple, we fell asleep.

When I woke two days later in a clean bed at the little boarding house on Fasanenstrasse where Kyril's father, Semyon Semyonich, was living, my sense of well-being made me realize the wonder of liberty. I must have slept the clock around, for all was calm. From the street I could hear the noise of Klaxons. Kyril came in with his habitual smile. "Well, this is better, isn't it?" He threw me soap and a towel.

Semyon Semyonich listened to our story with attention. Father and son were immensely similar in their appearance and way of speech. Each had a habit of cocking his head and listening with one hand behind an ear. What we told Kyril's father about the customs of the *Paedagogium* seemed hardly credible, but when he heard the full story he entirely approved of our escape.

That evening I talked on the phone to my little brother. He was jubilant and called my mother to the phone. But Mother was in bed already; it was her husband who answered. His voice was ironic.

"Aha! The gentleman from Thuringia! . . . Run away!"

I started to pour out the story of the school, of our escape. I had hardly spoken ten words when my stepfather snapped,



"Yes, yes. I see. More bother for your poor mother!"  
 This time my stepfather was not acting. The note of bitterness and pathos in his voice was real. He hated to see me back. I threw down the receiver.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

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THE FRUITS OF my hard-won liberty were in some ways bitter. Relations with my mother and stepfather grew worse and I spent much time loitering in the streets, sitting on public benches or at the movies. Sometimes I went to the cemetery. The tree by my father's grave had grown and was in flower. The place for sad musings. Moreover, from the moment the mind was turned from private misfortune, it rested on evidences of public calamity.

The school had reeked of dissatisfaction with the Weimar Constitution and the Government of the Second Reich. It had abounded in sarcastic allusions to the "Versailles government", the "Masonic-Jew Republic", and to its administration by "a parliamentary scratch-team of quitters", agents and accomplices in a "fantastic Judeo-International swindle".

To the official curriculum, the professors added the task of memorizing such eloquence as this: "Bled and gutted by the Versailles mandate, the profligate republic is at the mercy of international bankers and is already in a state of gangrenous decay. In the cities, native-born Germans, enslaved, oppressed, deceived, and derided, submit to being exploited by pushing newcomers. The Jews have all the power; they even meddle in education. What impudence! But the hour of revenge will come! Germany will gain a hundred per cent mastery."

The atmosphere of the school had been uncongenial enough to make me sceptical of its doctrines. On the other hand, the plight of native-born Germans was certainly wretched, as anyone could see. Germany was stricken and bleeding. Her present was infernal and her future was without hope. She



had been strangled by years of blockade, and agricultural production was at its lowest. All the burghers' reserves had been invested in war bonds which were now worthless. Insurance companies had ceased payments. Pensioners, annuity holders and such folk found their small incomes valueless as prices rose to astronomic figures. Each day the effects of the national defeat were more bitterly felt. The economic life of the country was destroyed. Millions of demobilized soldiers had no work and no prospects. Thousands of reserve officers were trying to scrape a living by selling petty wares from door to door or by peddling cocaine.

A dollar was worth millions of marks. The favourable rate of exchange attracted pleasure-seekers and profiteers in hordes. Sitting by my father's grave, I might feel deep respect for him and a sense of personal loss that brought tears to my eyes; but I could not escape the fact that by blood and affiliation I myself was one of those hated foreigners nor could I fail to recognize that the hatred was a natural one.

Many of us "Ausländer" were living in Lucullan luxury, sometimes with vulgar ostentation, while even middle-class Germans starved and went in rags. And we were buying, for negligible sums, properties that Germans had acquired or built up by the labour of years. One might argue that this was Germany's penalty for defeat; but those who were profiting by it were by no means the men who had made the most sacrifices to secure Allied victory. Neither were they predominantly Jewish. They were people wholly absorbed either in trivial and sometimes vicious pleasure or in money-making and limitless exploitation. And they knew no more of Germany than they could see through the plate-glass windows of their sumptuous hotels on Unter den Linden or the Kurfürstendamm.

All this is familiar, if at times forgotten, truth. In my adolescence I understood the situation more in terms of effects than causes; but I unquestionably experienced a prescience of evil. I sensed in the singing, sweating, half-starved youths hiking with haversacks over the country an abeyance of will, a fanatical acceptance of slaughter and being led to slaughter, that approximated to a national obsession.

And as a foreigner not subject to this obsession, I was struck by the braying theatricality of the patriotic torch-bearers. And also by the range of indiscriminate hatreds they were inciting: against internationalists, pacifists, Masons, Slavs, Frenchmen, Americans, Negroes, Jews—even bicyclists! They were against



everything that wasn't Fritz and didn't have the double chin and shaved neck of the Junker. Individuals without personal interests or aims, these apocalyptic scorpions were fit for nothing but burial on the battlefield.

When such persons inspire confidence and gain influence, it is certain that the people have a desperate appetite for illusion. I had seen enough evidence of that appetite so that, had I known what an insignificant-looking vegetarian confined in the fortress of Landsberg was writing in his manuscript of *Mein Kampf*, I could hardly have failed to observe that his delusions were already common in the sleepy villages of Thuringia. His acolytes were working for him there and elsewhere; periodicals and literature were seeping in; pamphlets clamoured for Hitler's release. Nor was leadership lacking for this movement. There were those needy, frustrated officers headed by von der Goltz, Captain Stinnes, Lt. Rossbach, Generals von Epp and Kapp, and the *Freikorps* of Silesia. Above all—as a medium well suited to incubate the Fascist germ to the point of a “positive reaction”—there was the pestilential atmosphere of Germany, an atmosphere of which any lonely, sensitive boy who was much in the streets could not fail to be conscious.







PART THREE

TWILIGHT OF THE  
BOULEVARD GODS

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*CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR*

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ONE DAY A LETTER CAME from Paris. Uncle Spiridon wrote that, if I could get the necessary travel papers, I might come and join a lycée in France. Fearing opposition from my family, I said nothing about this letter, but from that day various Alexanderplatz officials had occasion to remember the zeal and industry of a young man of fifteen in a student cap dashing from floor to floor, begging for a Russian refugee Nansen pass. After obtaining this document I spent entire days in the French consul's anteroom and by the end of a month had a French visa.

Meanwhile my rupture with the family had become, if possible, more nearly complete. We were living in Wilmersdorf. My stepfather's brother had lately been much in evidence, a fellow with a face like a damp rat. His friends filled the house from attic to cellar, making up to my mother with the one idea of getting money from her. I could never manage to talk to her alone. She seemed to be having frequent quarrels with her husband and sometimes my name came in.

Everyone was tired of having me around. Seated in her armchair, my mother avoided meeting my eye; perhaps she dreaded a kindling of affection. My stepfather, from his store of stage dialogue, was always ready with a reference to my worthlessness.

He and my mother were drinking tea and discussing my stepfather's rôle in Piscator's new play when I produced my French visa and demanded the fare to Paris. At first they were blankly amazed. Then my stepfather said, "Of course! What

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else could you expect of the gentleman from Thuringia? Paris, naturally. Paris is waiting for him!"

As a matter of form, Mother started making suggestions. She would increase my allowance. We could find a school in Berlin and I would live at home. . . .

"Live here?" my stepfather interjected. "No, no! Let him go join his worthy uncle in Paris! He'll feel quite at home with him."

I cut short his outburst. "Oh, what's the use of arguing? I have to be packing."

I packed my bags that same evening. When I left the house the two of them were still quarrelling. He was reproaching her with being too lenient with me. She was accusing him of breaking up her home. . . .

French officials at the Belgian frontier held a veritable caucus to determine whether any danger to the French Republic lurked behind my pretence of going to Paris for study. I had had intimations of the bitterness of defeat in Germany. The flush of victory in France, on the other hand, had not rendered the nation sanguine to the point of reckless cordiality. My impressions from the train window, moreover, afforded few hints of prosperity; up-to-date houses were rarer than in Germany and the industrial concentration was less dense, an hour's journey affording me a view of only one factory.

From the Gare de l'Est I found my way to a clean, well-ordered apartment, where my aunt received me with brimming eyes. She had my father's portrait over her bed. Uncle Spiridon, somewhat aged but still striking in appearance, seemed in his element. He was spending his days in cafés on the Champs Elysées, hatching combinations and deals with messieurs of like temperament. They bought and sold shares, speculating on a falling market. They alluded to their activities as *le Commerce* in a tone of unctuous benevolence that made me recall those eighteenth-century allegorical engravings, in which Commerce, enthroned among wheat sheaves, waves a welcoming forearm towards several ships coming into port with the wealth of the Indies. *Le Commerce* was a new activity to me and I studied it eagerly.

Uncle Spiridon used to take me to a café, where we ordered coffee with cream and *brioche*s. We kept being interrupted by people who came to our table to chat with him in some strange language. Between times he held forth to me on the greatness of France, the soundness of her republicanism, and the solvency



of the franc. He also spoke of the superiority of her system of education, her quickening pace and modernity and her enhanced world importance.

And, indeed, Paris hummed in its way. It was a relief not to see any hungry or evil faces. The air was light; I felt my lungs expand. The night clubs and cafés dazzled me with their imposing new fittings, marble polychrome fronts with silvered columns and ranks of shining plate glass. On the Champs Elysées Paris kept open house to the world. Armenians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Americans thronged the cafés, merrily discussing business or arranging *nuits d'amour* at a hundred francs a throw. A gay, richly dressed international crowd thronged to see Maurice Chevalier, Mistinguette, Dranem, and Saint-Granier. Casinos, theatres, brothels, churches and museums were all jammed. The luxury hotels overflowed. Travel agencies were despatching hundreds of sightseers to the battlefields of the Somme and the Argonne.

Thus half of Uncle Spiridon's noted eloquence would have been more than enough to persuade me to stay in Paris. But there was a practical difficulty which he brought up presently. My visa would expire in two weeks. Russians were not popular in France; they were only tolerated. It was safer to be a Greek. In short, Uncle Spiridon proposed to adopt me! He owed that much, he said, to my poor father.

I was startled, having always thought of Greeks as a nondescript people, the stepchildren of Europe. As for my "poor father", what would he have thought of Uncle Spiridon's proposition? Wanting to stay on in Paris, I had no choice.

My uncle proved as deft in arranging this matter as in *le Commerce*. It was discreetly managed on a third floor of a *hôtel particulier* near the Avenue Hoche. Some dark-skinned gentlemen, who talked rapidly, jumbling their words and pronouncing their *j*'s like *z*'s, kept clapping my uncle on the shoulder and telling him that it was "quite all right and perfectly legal". Apparently they accepted my uncle's contention that he had been Greek consul at Odessa. One of them, who wore white spats and a well-cut morning coat with a flower in the lapel, handed me a little folder adorned with a white cross on a blue ground—a rather tenuous, but, as it was to prove, important link with a land I had never seen. I raised my right hand, signed my photograph, and shook the damp and limp fingers which the man in the morning coat extended to me.

I was now a Greek. I came out feeling less well-authentic-



ated than before, in fact, a complete anomaly. But Paris teemed with such anomalies. . . .

Uncle Spiridon had said that Russians were only tolerated in France, meaning that they were apt to be chucked out. With my altered status I was not deported, but I was still only tolerated. No mere document could rid me of my Russian interests and loyalties. Moreover, my German was better than my French, and even to talk of Germany classified one as a Boche. After I entered the lycée I could not make friends with my French fellow-students. They were distant, uncomprehending, and complacent—these Puifontaines, de Roses, du Moulins, and Durands. Isolation, as usual, sharpened my powers of observation and faculty of criticism.

I had come to France not without certain prepossessions. In my boyish dreams of martial glory I had made room for the great figures of French history—the French Revolution and the era succeeding it had made a great impression on me. Especially Napoleon Bonaparte. My days at the lycée in Fontainebleau gained interest and charm from the lustre Bonaparte had conferred on the city, its château, its fountains, the lake with its swans.

At sunset a golden light drenched the avenues with their formal rows of trees. Shadows lengthened in the park and along the terraces of the château. The triumphal arches, the fountains, everything seemed well calculated to set forth Bonaparte's grandeur. The keeper of the grounds, François, would talk for hours about the Little Corporal and the "great century". While he was speaking the ancient glories seemed still real.

As night fell over the lake, the château murmured of departed splendour, defeated hope. The very lamp-posts were eloquent of the past; standing massive and confident, they spoke of strong men. The two eagles on the gilded gate, with beaks proudly raised, shrieked into the wind: "Victory, victory! New laurels while the old are still green!" As a Russian I could not but reflect that the eagles were somewhat too arrogant—had they never heard of Borodino? I was proud that their master had met his Nemesis in my country . . .

But walking down the avenue, inhaling the smell of tar from the wooden pavement and the petrol exhaust from the buses that brought tourists from Paris, I was quickly brought back to reality. Adjourning to a bistro, I would forget my conversations with François. It was all too evident that my schoolmates,



who would be the French leaders in my generation, were heedless of the darkness thickening around the eagles of Fontainebleau; they were engrossed in billiards and poker, or twitting the barmaids.

These successors of the whiskered grenadiers were slight, smooth-faced lads in bob-tailed jackets, fond of enlarging upon their petty emotions, sensations and "problems"—which, judging from their effeminate gestures, had little connection with glory, past or future. None of them gave thought to society or to France's situation: they were too preoccupied with cheap flirts, screen actors and "*le sport*".

At home they were intolerable. There was Henri Laurent, for instance, a youth with great velvety eyes. Henri boxed his mother's ears and stole whatever money she tried to hide from him. His father had been exhausted by three years at the front, and, hoping to attain a delayed happiness, shut his eyes to whatever Henri did. The youth was developing into one of the monsters of a generation that was to produce its Staviskys, Hanaus, as well as Cagoulards and Croix de Feu—the generation that allowed France to collapse. A whole troop of future bribe-takers was perched at the smart new bars drinking cocktails and displaying over flaccid forms an artfully tailored boulevard swagger. They had grown up regarding their elders with pitying—or should one say pitiless—contempt. What imbeciles, to have gone out to fight for nothing, and come back gassed and coughing! Not all these youths were bad, but they affected to have no hearts; and certainly Mistinguette, Chevalier and Dranem could not inspire them with the force and honesty they would need in the next fifteen years to avert national degradation.

Those who had money were spending it on bachelor quarters, mistresses, and cocktails. They discussed *l'argent*, *les affaires*, and *les femmes* with a knowingness that was somehow terrifying. All these terms suggested merely some racket by which they hoped to rise from comfortable security to luxury and wealth. Absorbed in the records of the last hundred-metre swim or some scandalous orgy in the Bois de Boulogne, they saw no further than the ends of their noses—not to mention another organ much vaunted in these bourgeois circles.

Nor did French education justify Uncle Spiridon's boasts. It was less thorough than the German. Although the professors called themselves individualists, they paid little attention to students' individual problems. Neither they nor the Ministry of Education showed the least concern about the mental decay



and physical debility of France's young sport fans. My history professor, M. Monnier, an ardent Bonapartist, used to say France died at St. Helena. M. Vignaux, who taught mathematics, contended France perished on the execution blocks in 1789. The night watchman assured me she had died at Verdun.

It was hard for me to see the connection between all that and the great century that appeared to be open to France. At the moment when her armies had secured hegemony over Europe, not the Republican tricolour, not even Bonaparte's eagles, but the withered lilies of the house of Bourbon were brought out and feebly paraded.

France emerged from the war not victorious, but imbued with narrow chauvinism on one side and complacent pacifism, or rather *s'en foutisme*, on the other. Instead of sharing the fruits of the French Revolution with the rest of Europe, France built her hegemony on such systems as the Maginot Line, the Little Entente, and the Cordon Sanitaire—a barrier erected against evil emanations from the Soviet Union. Meanwhile at school the *Camelots du Roi* were reciting Daudet, professors were quoting Charles Maurras, and Germans and Russians were as much detested as Russians and Frenchmen were at the Thuringian school. Once I tried to explain to some young people the imbecility of their blind nationalism. I just missed being mobbed by the entire class. As a result I was sent for by the *Surveillant Général*.

His white chin whiskers—which he wore in the style of Napoleon III—shook with rage. "Monsieur! We are not Communists here! Go to Russia if you want to make speeches in favour of Germany!"

France's reliance upon the fascination of her archaic classical culture was the more tragic for its being so absolute. The charm failed to operate in the case of most foreign students. Native colonials from Annam and Cochin-China hated France with such rancour that French students often came to blows with them; the natives cherished dreams of liberation and were like the reconnaissance party of an unsuspected enemy. This was especially true of a nephew of Abd el Krim, the Moroccan rebel, with whom I became acquainted. There were many Russian emigrés in my class, some of them bearing such distinguished names as Counts Tolstoy, Magalov, Ouspensky, Sherbatov and Galitzin. We were much together, and remained—or were held—aloof.

Toward the end of the year 1925, still in the status of a



resident student, I removed to the Lycée Michelet at Vanves in preparation for my baccalaureate. The closeness of Paris was magnetic and conducive to rowdy expeditions with school-mates to Montmartre, to some brothel and to impromptu *monômes*—street celebrations in the Quartier Latin or the Grands Boulevards—in defiance of every standard of behaviour prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Or I would go on excursions in the Bois, to Versailles or the Luxembourg Gardens, and come back drunk with the enchantment of the soft Paris air. Often I would go to a two-franc movie with some *midinette* on my arm; we would eat *chocolats glacés* and hold hands under the spell of Valentino or Ramon Novarro.

At one of the countless *bals musettes* of Montmartre, I met Christine, a pale, blonde girl with the thin face of a slum-child, consisting of two startled eyes, a sketch of a mouth, and nothing one might dignify by the name of profile. She had been working from the time she left *l'école communale* in the back of a modiste's shop at a few francs a day. At seventeen she was so nearsighted from sewing and lacemaking that we always had to sit in the front row at the movies. Bred in the workers' quarter of Clichy, she had never seen flowers growing naturally. One Sunday I took her to the Bois de Boulogne. She flung herself on the moist earth and kissed the daisies. Later we went rowing on the lake. Accustomed to a workroom where sun and air penetrated only through a slit in the ceiling, Christine found the air too sharp; she fainted and began coughing. Her mother and grandmother had died of tuberculosis. A year later, over a bottle of *pinard* in a Place Clichy bistro, her father, an alcoholic construction worker, gave me the details of her death.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

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YEARS OF STUDY WENT BY. I continued to love Paris, though it often repelled and offended me.

The women all had their hair bobbed. Like everyone else,



my aunt and her exile friends wore short skirts and stepped briskly and smartly into American bars in an effort to persuade the world they were ten years younger. Perched on the high stools which had replaced the easy chairs of the old cafés, these women in their skimpy dresses made ample revelation of bosom, hip, and thigh. Tourists and "flappers" thronged the dance places. The women favoured parasitic males who brilliantined their hair, pencilled their eyebrows and wore tight trousers and long-pointed shoes. It meant nothing to withdraw from the dancing with such a *beau gosse* to a hotel room.

My absorption in the idea of a *grande passion* was scoffed at as Muscovite barbarism. Anyway, said my friends, I wasn't the type. I would wait hours in a Metro station clutching a nose-gay and if the girl showed up at all she would generally laugh at the flowers.

Serious conversation with my bourgeois schoolmates was impossible. For that I had to go to a Syrian, an Arab, a Russian or a Spaniard. The young Frenchmen were chiefly concerned with getting a solid dowry or meeting a well-to-do American woman. Their brazenness stupefied me. It was smart to be openly kept in funds by some woman of Balzacian ripeness. One classmate of mine after taking his arts degree was subsidized by a madame of indefinable age, who set him up as co-proprietor of a disreputable hotel near the Avenue Wagram. I remember seeing him one day at the concierge window in his smart little jacket reading *L'Auto*, while prostitutes patrolled the pavement in front. Other fellows from the Quartier du Temple and the Rue des Rosiers, while avoiding the scabrous, yet had no standards to do them credit. They aped each other in copying English tailoring from the free adaptations observed in American films.

The war had dried up these young people. Pampered and spoiled by the excess female population with which Europe was overrun, the wealthy stratum of which had flocked to Paris, they were cynical about love and friendship. Manual labour was generally condemned as an imbecility. The alternative was playing the market between drinks and placing bets at the American bar. And there were those luncheons gotten up by *demi-mondaines* and *poules* of various categories; these had some indefinable connection with politics, finance and racketeering and were occasions for all sorts of queer commissions and handouts.

These were the young men who pretended to set an example to the workers and peasants of victorious France. I could not



help recalling Dr. Scholle's expostulation that the modern Rome was failing to solve the problem of work and production. Returning of an evening to Vanves, I found myself longing to be in Russia. In spite of crowds and gaiety, Paris was empty. Her point of view left no room for genuine feelings, comradeship or progress. I was driven to write long letters to my classmates at the German school—since behind all the ugliness of their circumstances and behaviour, it was at least possible to discern some element of feeling, yearning after an ideal or desire for social change.

The summer was hot in Paris, the streets deserted. I drank black coffee and often worked all night to make up for the time I had lost running wild on the steppes and idling in Berlin hotels. All this preparation for my second baccalaureate in philosophy seemed rather futile as I pondered on the obscurity of the future. We Russians—"poor devils", as our classmates called us—were all in the same boat and appeared to be going nowhere.

The young Frenchmen were occupied with sport, pleasure and vacation plans. Their lives were charted. Some were already affianced, sure of considerable dowries and a place in the industrial, mercantile, or professional life of the nation. The Egyptians, Peruvians and Chileans would return to their families and the positions awaiting them. They were respected aliens whose path at the university had been smoothed by overseers, proctors, and examiners. Flattered by attention and duly indoctrinated with Montesquieu, Malesherbes, Boileau, and Chateaubriand, they would become exponents abroad of French policy. They would be asked to receptions at the Embassy, and would be encouraged to keep up their subscriptions to *Candide* and *Gringoire* and their patronage of *belles lettres*.

We Russians in exile had a harder road before us. We talked of going to the colonies after finishing our studies, and of the possibility of acquiring French citizenship by military service in North Africa. Or we might emigrate to Paraguay or the Belgian Congo. Then there was the hopeful conjecture that the USSR would extend a general amnesty to the offspring of White émigrés. Most of us had impoverished relatives who were selling their last jewels and for whom we would have to provide. As the final examinations approached, I was not afraid of them, but rather of what would come after leaving the sheltered life at the lycée.



In the middle of classes this great interrogation point would obtrude itself, blotting everything else from my mind. General unemployment was having its effect in stringent legislation against foreigners. The immediate question was how to get a *carte de travail*, a work card. The French public viewed all Russians as offspring of the "traitors of Brest-Litovsk", a favourite expression of my history professor. We were also "repudiators of just obligations".

On every street corner a concierge held a broom and wagged her head: "O là, là! These Russians. They get up revolutions—and then they don't pay their debts". In each *arrondissement* of Paris there were thrifty French investors who would not soon forget how their cherished savings had been lost in Russian war loans.

On Armistice day representatives of Allied nations paraded through the Arc de Triomphe and placed their wreaths on the tomb of the unknown soldier. There were Uruguayans, Siamese and Ecuadorians. They all had helped win the war. Russia, whose dead numbered fifty per cent. of the war total, was not represented. To us waifs and strays in the labyrinthine corridors of the Sorbonne, it was a staggering affront.

After the examinations I decided to continue my studies, despite worsening financial conditions. Remittances from home grew scarcer and scarcer. Five ill-made and unsuccessful pictures had eaten up most of the patrimony left my brother and me, and bad speculations had taken my mother's fortune—not to mention the expense of continually flitting from Monte Carlo to Berlin and from Berlin to Biarritz.

I lived for a time in the Rue des Ecoles with two Bulgars and a Lithuanian, the four of us sharing two mattresses and scant meals. Later I roomed with a Russian friend in Passy; he had mild blue eyes, was slightly asthmatic, and drove a taxi at night while continuing his engineering studies. In the autumn of 1926 cheques from home were entirely discontinued. At the age of eighteen I had to abandon my studies and look for work.

Passy swarmed with my compatriots in exile. The older ones were either ill or indolent. They continued to live on lamentations, absurd illusions, and what they had been able to salvage of former wealth. Some pitied them, but that all-powerful personage in Parisian life, the concierge, was likely to remark that it was no wonder they had been kicked out of Russia if they were fair specimens of the former ruling classes.

The younger exiles were quite different. They were model



factory workers, often more efficient than the Frenchmen with whom they competed at Renault or Citroen. Russian taxi-drivers were trustworthy and courteous, discreet and self-respecting. The Russians working on French farms showed diligence and good grace. Best of all, none of us younger ones expected to receive favours because of our names or titles. In the practice of this virtue, however, we could hardly hope to offset the discreditable behaviour of many of our elders, who grovelled and strutted almost simultaneously. A former lieutenant-colonel of the Imperial Guard would descend from the heights to open the door of a night club and with noble obsequiousness drop hints of his high origin—all in the hope of getting a handsome gratuity or of being asked to dinner by some wealthy American.

I held jobs as varied as they were impermanent. I worked at the Renault plant at Billancourt as a lathe-operator's helper. I taught children grammar. I was a super at the Folies Bergères. I worked at a currency exchange in the Rue des Petites Écuries. There were a dozen occupations that enabled me to live, to exist, to pay the rent of the hotel room to which I returned in the evening exhausted, to toss my shoes under the bed and lie prone staring through the little hole that passed for a window at a sky that was always grey. Outside and beneath were the Paris streets, but I saw only a few roofs bathed in the milky light so familiar in the workers' quarters in the winter months.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

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MY LATEST POSITION was with a travel agency, working as museum guide and interpreter. A mixed public trailed after me from room to room in the Louvre. We had come to the French painters of the eighteenth century, Fragonard, Watteau, Le Nain, whose figures pursued their pastoral pleasures against backgrounds of rich draperies, urns, fountains, balustrades, and



porticos, ingeniously mingled with landscape and feathery verdure. Tourists nudged one another and asked bizarre questions. There were a few bored-looking students. A lean, spectacled schoolteacher evinced a rapacious interest and questioned me tirelessly. Since quitting the Rubens collection, I had hardly been able to take my eyes off a blonde girl with ardent and exceptionally large grey eyes, who had joined our group. She was wearing a neat tailored suit, heelless shoes, and no stockings. She followed with equal intelligence my patter in four languages, making casual notes in the margins of her guide to the Louvre.

From the moment I noticed her I was so far smitten that I wandered from my prepared speeches and babbled any nonsense, speaking with a disproportionate emphasis of Boucher's line and contours, of the ladies' towering coiffures, the gentlemen's high heels, of the cosmetics used by actresses, and of Watteau's décors. I thought only of holding her by some spell of eloquence, for the capacity of imagination which had been mine from infancy exalted her into a dream vision.

It was closing hour. The crowd was dispersing. She stayed behind and addressed me in French with a strong Slavic flavour. Her voice and intonation were music. I felt awkward and dared not look her in the face. I blushed and stammered like a schoolboy at his first adventure.

"Polish?" I inquired. Surely she would notice my discomposure!

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Your accent," I gasped.

As we walked together through the communicating galleries, I tossed off phrases about the dramatic passages in Gauguin's paintings and Ingres' use of colour. My only idea was to prolong the enchantment, so that I could go on experiencing the tremor occasioned by every aspect of her appearance and personality, the low voice, the lambent grey eyes, the lithe form, proud bearing, long shapely hands, the whole aristocratic elegance of her movements.

The last visitor had left. An old attendant was testing the locks. We continued to sit on the sofa facing one of Murillo's madonnas. . . . Coming down the steps of the Louvre to the Tuileries Gardens, I diffidently guided her elbow. It was already dusk. We crossed the Gardens and came to the Seine embankment. And somehow we came to a pause before the door of a little restaurant in the Rue de la Cité, looked at it, looked at one another, laughed, went in, and ordered dinner.



Wanda was living in the Latin Quarter, studying medicine. She belonged to the old Polish landed nobility. Her father had been close to Pilsudski from the moment the Polish Legion was formed. Once Poland was liberated he withdrew to his estate near Lvov. At sixteen Wanda had been betrothed to a neighbour of her own class, who was now pursuing his career as military attaché in the embassy at B——. The revelation of this awkward fact was softened by her charmingly pressing my hand; my heart leaped. Now after a tedious school term she was vacationing, doing museums and the châteaux of the Loire. She was learning French, which she spoke fascinatingly, rolling her *r*'s and stressing the final syllables. Her *oui*'s and *non*'s came out in a funny clipped manner and she accompanied them with a movement of the head that sent part of her mane of blonde hair tumbling over her forehead.

At twenty Wanda was in the second term at medical school. She dabbled in painting and played Chopin Polonaises; she was related to the composer through her mother. Before returning to Poland she hoped to tour through Southern Europe. We had much in common and yet our worlds were so different! We must have seemed an exotic couple, full of the promise of happiness. We hardly noticed that we were drawing the amused, interested glances of midinettes and their transient beaux; Parisians delight in lovers. It was spring and other couples strolled with us along the Seine embankment. An occasional light from the Quai Saint Michel penetrated the shadows, but the trees of the Place du Cloître Notre Dame created a favouring dimness. I was in ecstasy.

We spent the summer together in a happiness that extended dizzily to the objects around us, so that the Paris sidewalks, the bistros on the Left Bank and the sedate old masters in the museums seemed to swim and dance before our eyes. Life was good. When I took Wanda in my arms she threw back her head, her hair floated gently round her face and her grey eyes told me that her love would be strong and lasting . . .

At the end of August we moved to a quiet Norman tavern in Calvados. The summer folk had left already and the countryside was deserted. The earth was wet and black, the sky a foreboding grey. Dull clouds hung low over the twisted roads as though to crush us. Gnarled and soaked with rain, the shrubbery cast grotesque shadows in our path. Dampness saturated everything and the despair of nature was vocal in the cadences of frogs and the falling leaves. Strolling back from a ramble in the rain we would turn up our coat collars.



"Hold my hand tighter," Wanda would say as the darkness deepened. "I'm scared. The blackness, and these bare trees. They look like grasping hands, the hands of some evil old sorcerer. . . ."

We did not understand nature's warning. We even found something to relish in the contrast between these sombre days and the summer months. This Norman interlude, pallid and ghostlike though it was, seemed to bring an easy relaxation into our relations, a homely companionship that had its special enchantment.

There was a piano at the inn. Coming in drenched with rain Wanda would sit at the keyboard playing Tchaikovsky, Debussy and Beethoven, while I posted myself near the window with its pots of geraniums and, holding a book on my knees, would drift off in a reverie. We could hear the old innkeeper moving around in the next room. She talked much to us of her household treasures, objects associated with the members of her family, who had lived here time out of mind. We heard an endless saga of their lives and deaths. . . .

On fairer days we would walk in the fields, starting back only when we heard the muffled tolling of the Angelus. It was still except for the grinding of a distant cartwheel or cows lowing in the road as they came in from pasture. The old woman would have a delectable meal waiting for us.

In our room was a big oaken bed. On a shelf at the bedside was a Bible. The mantelpiece was littered with all those keepsakes that tell of a stable existence. . . .

Once Wanda laughed and asked if I wouldn't like to stay here always. Then, not waiting for my reply, she ran downstairs, and as though to harden herself, sang a brash medley of Polish songs and military marches and played the latest hits from the Casino de Paris.

It was too much happiness; I know it could not last. And then one day a letter came.

Wanda looked grave. Her father was ill. She must set out at once for Poland—take the next boat. That night we scarcely slept, there was so much to be said.

The days were briefer now. The uneven pavements at Le Havre were wet and we picked our way among puddles. There were windswept clouds. It was autumn and the September gale tore its way into the most sheltered nooks at the port, and it seemed a parable of the fashion in which Wanda was being torn from me.



In a few days the *Cap Pologne* would sail, taking Wanda away. We registered at the hotel as man and wife, since the proprietor insisted. I remember Wanda signed for us both some absurd, incomprehensible Polish name . . .

We said little about the parting. I was afraid to speak of it; her leaving affected me as monstrous. I could not believe, as Wanda had said, that the separation would be only temporary. So I saw her to the boat with a heavy heart.

At the very last moment I suddenly felt that our separation would violate nature itself. A few minutes before sailing time I boarded the ship without passport or Polish visa, with only some identification papers from the Sorbonne, an old valise, and a third-class passage one way. As for getting back, my idea was to work my passage. Or rather, actually Wanda was my only idea.

The hours went by slowly. One after another the lights in the cabin-class were extinguished. Pacing up and down on the aft deck I thought how surprised and happy Wanda would be to see me.

It was no easy matter to make my way from the unluxurious quarters I shared with humble Letts and repatriated Poles to Wanda's cabin in the first class. It was two in the morning before I was able to slip up the companion-way . . .

Outside Wanda's stateroom I heard footsteps. I paused for a moment on the stairs. A man in the white uniform of a ship's officer was turning the handle of her door. I heard low whispers; the door swung open; there was a muffled laugh.

There could be no mistake. It was Wanda's voice.

I waited, frozen to the stairs, my right hand clutching the scrollwork of the balustrade. The sharp edge of the metal bit into my palm. The pain steadied me. I clenched my fist until the lacy ironwork began to bend.

Seconds seemed hours. There was a strange hollow feeling around my heart; my knees were weak. I prayed that something would happen. Maybe some door would open, somebody would come by. Anything to break the tense uncertainty.

Wanda's door opened wider.

The white uniform was entering her cabin.

Then I acted. Impulsively. Just something to relieve that awful hollow feeling round the heart.

I swung the uniform around. For a split second I saw a pale, fatuous face. A young deck officer out for an affair. I hit him. Wanda, startled and horrified, looked on from the half-open door. The officer broke away, holding his temple, and



disappeared down the corridor. Apparently he was determined to avoid scandal.

Wanda stood in the doorway, a coat thrown over her negligée. Her face wore a look I had never seen before. Silently we stared at each other.

What had actually happened? With my whole heart I tried to believe I had been mistaken. That fatuous fellow in the white uniform wouldn't have needed any special invitation from Wanda; he was one of those handsome officers who fancied no woman could resist him. Or had she encouraged him after all?

Not an explanation, not a word from Wanda. Only that queer expression.

I thought for a moment that I understood that look. I had seen it before in Lyda's eyes. But those had been strange, cat-like eyes and the woman had hated me. But in Wanda's eyes there was something worse than hatred: indifference; unpleasant surprise; annoyance. She offered no explanation and I was certainly too proud to demand any.

"*Bliad!*" \* I clenched my teeth. I could find no other words. Turning away, I hurried down the stairs.

My whole impulse was to hide and stay in the third class for the remainder of the voyage. I felt chained. There was a dreadful pressure at my throat. I woke strangling, my heart palpitating. Yet always smiling grey eyes followed me.

I did not see Wanda again until our ship docked in Gdynia. Amid friends and heaps of luggage she was waiting at the first-class gangplank to land. She wore a smart coat and was carrying a bunch of roses in her neatly gloved hands. The same deck officer whose eye I had blackened stood beside her. It must have been a stiff punch, for he had been invisible all the latter part of the voyage.

From my station near the gangplank I studied Wanda's face questioningly. Approaching her native shore she had undergone a change. It was almost as though she regretted her relation with me. Apparently I was good enough for the bistros and art galleries. But now—? Now she was among her own set and the gulf between us had widened, the great gulf between the dispossessed, of whom I was a sample, and the wealthy aristocrats of Poland who were reaping rich benefits from the post-war treaties. On her own soil, Wanda was surrounded with well-dressed, distinguished-looking men who were always bending over her hand.

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\* Whore.



Was this the same Wanda who had spoken of our separation as only momentary? Who had listened for hours to peasant chronicles, ranged through the Norman woodlands and fields, and strolled with me on the banks of the Seine?

All my hopes were pinned on the chance of seeing her at the railway station, where she would board the Warsaw train. Against the pass inspector's orders, I descended the gangplank and went ashore. Crowds loitered on the pier. In Gdynia, Poland's new seaport on the Baltic, scaffolding spoke of building in progress. Feeling a trifle uneasy from the moment I quitted the *Cap Pologne*, I took a brick-paved road leading away from the traffic into the dunes, beyond which there was an indefinite succession of beaches with new empty bathing cabins. To the south-east were Zoppot and the Free City of Danzig. The wind from the north was cutting. As I stumbled along Pilsudski's uneven pavements without proper pass or visa, I was hardly aware that I was facing the harshest fascism in Europe, one more blatant than Hungary's, Rumania's, or Bulgaria's. I thought only of once more pressing Wanda's hand, and perhaps obtaining from her grey eyes a last intimation of the old good feeling.

My only excuse was that I was nineteen.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

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I NEVER REACHED the station.

"*Prosze pana!* Come along, you—to the *Straz Pograniczna!*" In such terms Poland's hospitality was extended to me. Two big fellows started to drag me to a new building that was their police headquarters. I tried to persuade them to take me to the depot, where Wanda could explain my situation, but by the time I fumbled the necessary Polish words together I was given to understand that the Warsaw train had already left.

So that was that. While Wanda rolled towards Warsaw, I



was being booked on the charge of entering Poland—and, more heinous, the fortified port of Gdynia—without permit, passport or visa, behaviour that clearly marked me as a Bolshevik agent. The deck officer whom I had mauled had evidently taken steps to establish my identity as such, and to deprive me of the opportunity of returning to Le Havre on the *Cap Pologne*.

The questioning began in bad French. My inquisitor had a domed forehead and a bald crown. In a sort of file before him lay various documents, to which my only identification paper, from the Sorbonne, was added. He would not believe my story about Wanda and was deaf to all my remonstrances that the whole thing had been a mistake, one of life's little ironies, as I termed it, striving to bear my disillusion like a man of the world. I explained that my boat would sail in a few hours, and that I had no inclination to be stuck in Poland without papers or money. Soon I understood that one idea alone influenced him, and that in the sense of the red flag waved at a bull: I was of Russian birth and that told the whole story.

They led me through a succession of rooms. The bad French had been abandoned in favour of intemperate Polish, in which every second word was a hateful interjection like "Russian swine", "Bolshevik", and "Jid". I was left to spend the night sitting up in a small antechamber of the *Tajna Policja* \* with a couple of chairs and pictures of bewhiskered Polish gentry staring at me from the walls.

Instead of releasing me the next morning as I had expected, they disallowed the evidence of my university identification paper and launched into their counter-revolutionary routine. I was in the midst of being photographed from all angles when a blast from the harbour informed me that the *Cap Pologne* was sailing.

Dusk fell but my questioners did not flag. In a few hours I had been transformed from a harmless "pilgrim of love" into a manacled plotter of high treason against the sovereign state of Poland. This Holy Inquisition, carried on in the name of Marshal Pilsudski's government, went on for forty-eight hours. At the end of it, kicked and battered, I was flung into a dark cell where other criminals sprawled on pallets on the floor.

The following day I was conducted to Warsaw to the general headquarters of the famous *Defensiva*. A harsh-visaged man identifying himself as Pan Tadeusz travelled with me across the immense Polish plains, where the mark of man's hand appeared in impoverished villages and vast seigniorial

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\* The secret police.



estates. A car met us at Warsaw and, after a short ride from the Gdanski station to the *Bracka*, a huge dark building engulfed us. It flaunted the red and white flag with the Polish eagle on a shield. With its maze of corridors, as remote from daylight as a catacomb and sparingly lighted by electric bulbs, it made me think of the Charité at Berlin, where I had once gone for a midnight prophylaxis; people spoke in the same hushed voices. I was questioned by two men in civil garb and one in uniform. My confinement was shared by adherents of the two Internationals, who were being subjected generally to the third degree and tortured along with certain minorities whose one crime was devotion to their native lands. The *Defensiva* was a murderous institution analogous to the Italian Fascist *Ovra* and the Rumanian *Seguranzia*, but perhaps even harsher and blinder.

Pan Rodzinski was well-dressed but shifty and verminous-looking. He began by apologizing in a queer, sing-song voice for my rough treatment. When he offered me a clean cell and three square meals a day if I would be a good lad and confess, I could hardly keep my face straight.

"So you stick to it that your motive was love?" He chuckled. "Huh, a new dodge from Moscow! Come, why not admit that you're an agent of Moscow and the Comintern? The Berlin branch at Bülowplatz?"

He talked to me for several minutes in German and Russian, his well-formed mouth and regular features hard and contemptuous. It was dawn when I fell asleep on a wooden bench, exhausted by the ordeal. Fist blows roused me. Two uniformed men under a sergeant's supervision, were pounding the back of my neck while they flattened my nose on the table so that it bled. They were laughing bestially. I caught one by the forearm and slung him into the corner of the room. Six gendarmes then joined in clubbing me to the floor. I got in a few blows but it was useless. There were sharp pains in my kidneys and at the base of my skull. Both arms were paralyzed by blows from the rubber truncheons.

After this questioning they flung me on a heap of straw in a special cell reserved for dangerous political offenders. There were iron bars from floor to ceiling. The guards had broken noses and cauliflower ears and wore clubs and pistols. Ten or more offenders shared my cell. Like me, many were nursing bruised flanks and bleeding heads. A meagre little Jew from Plock was bowing and praying in Yiddish; the back of his head was a shambles. The silence was broken only by his sobs. From



time to time a guard showed his nose at one of the narrow barred windows, which were some metres above the level of our floor. Towards evening half a score of peasants were flung into the cell, their clothing in tatters. They had been brought for interrogation from gaols in Lodz, Cracow, Grodno and Lvov.

I spent some days in that cage—how many I could not say, since there was no daylight. The nights were annihilating. Space and time ceased to exist in these dungeons in Warsaw, “the little Paris of the East”. Then I was led again through the long corridors to the room where I had been questioned before. My shifty inquisitor, Pan Rodzinski, was again placatory and expressed regret for the discourtesy of Pilsudski’s soldiers. This time he had a flower in his lapel. Another *Defensiva* man, whose revolver lay on a black notebook in front of him, seemed grave and ill at ease. Both began questioning me in Polish; they were determined to make me talk. I began again to explain to them in French that I was an emigré, the son of a prominent lawyer who had been a member of the Cadet party, and that I was a student in Paris. But they did not recognize my father’s name. And, what with my Russian and Greek affiliations and my various Berlin and Paris addresses, they found ample cause for exchanging suspicious glances. After a while Pan Rodzinski produced a bottle of cognac and they made me drink some. It gave me a belly-ache and I felt so nauseated that I leaned against the wall to keep from falling. I asked to go to the toilet and was frightened to find that I was urinating blood. My back was blue and green where I had been kicked and beaten. But neither this nor the cognac could alter the facts. Whereupon, with a glance of contempt, the officer sprang up, seizing his revolver.

“*Psia krew! Dran! Moskal!* Come now, confess or I’ll bring in the witnesses,” he shouted. He had drunk more than half of the cognac.

As though this were a signal, the door swung open and a woman came in—or, rather, a skeleton in a frayed lightweight coat, her hose wrinkled over bony knees and ankles, her dry hands hanging loosely at her sides. The startling thing was that she was pregnant—one of those sordid pregnancies of which the issue is certain to be tragic. Her glazed black eyes were empty.

She answered their questions in a brusque voice that betrayed her exhaustion. She said only *yes* or *no*. The officer asked her if she recognized me. She studied me from head to



toe and then shook her head. The officer fired a shot from his revolver, aiming between the woman and me.

"Bolshevik thieves!" he shouted. "Never saw him, eh? Speak to him in Russian!"

Apathetic even in the face of the shooting, the woman spoke a few Russian words.

Then they took me to a different place of confinement, a lugubrious rank of cells facing an alley. All night long groans and cries issued from behind the bolted doors, and all who heard knew from experience what they meant. Above the cries of others being tortured to extort confessions rang out a series of piercing shrieks. I learnt from the other prisoners that it was the voice of the woman who had refused to testify against me; they were pouring boiling urine down her throat to make her inform against her associates. There were unmentionable things done to women with dreadful hot irons, while Polish officers with lacquered boots and waxed moustaches came to enjoy the spectacle. The legacy of the Tsar in Poland was the knout and the *Ochrana*. These had been improved and modernized; Poland's system of torture was copied in nearly every country of Europe as the most effective for uncovering "Bolshevik plots".

Two witnesses, more complacent than the pregnant woman, were produced at my next day's grilling. They were perfect hooligan types, one wearing clothes so large for him that the sleeves hid his hands, the other a lean tubercular type with malicious eyes. Five *zloty* were probably enough to buy their evidence.

"Pan Jagodzinski, do you recognize this man?" asked the prosecutor of the former.

I was fixed by a wavering pair of eyes.

"Yes," he said, twisting a bowler hat, 1908 style, in his fingers. "Yes, I saw him in Warsaw at the Adria cabaret. He was with Lichtmann and Sergeyev."

These were doubtless incriminating names. The other, answering to the name of Pan Koslowski, nodded in agreement, shaking down a cloud of dandruff onto his greasy coat collar. I denied knowing either of them, but was grabbed by the throat and dragged across the room. I had only strength enough to spit in the officer's face. A blow across my eyes sent me reeling into a corner. The two perjurers grinned and the leaner one cackled. Then they signed their deposition and left. Pan Rodzinski tossed me a few Russian words, after which I was again beaten and flung in my cell. I spent some days on my



pallet, too exhausted to rise. Each night cries from adjacent cells offered painful distraction from my own sufferings.

While I languished among the so-called Reds, peasant men and women from Galicia and the Ukraine were under confinement at the other end of the corridor. Some were members of the much-advertised *Maslosoyus*, a semi-terrorist co-operative and agricultural organization. The Ukrainians' political credos seemed to vary all the way from the Fascist to the extreme Left. A few of them were in contact with their exiled chiefs in Paris. I later became acquainted with this organization, known as the Organization of the Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The Galician nationalists had headquarters in Vienna; the chiefs were former Galician officers of the Austrian army. Eugene Konavaletz, former Austrian colonel, directed their terrorist movement. Other peasants from the Carpathian section of the Ukraine had been caught while crossing the boundaries of the USSR to join their comrades, the Soviet Ukrainians. Divided as they were in their political philosophy, these groups were one in their hatred of the Polish government. They had made a succession of revolts against the Polish administration and committed acts of terrorism and sabotage until, falling victims to spies and *agents provocateurs*, they had wound up behind bars. The testimony tortured out of them brought reprisals on whole villages. Counter-espionage agents, aided by the police of other nations, tracked the leaders of the OUN to Paris, to Basle or Berlin. Sent back to Poland, they were tortured in the vaults of this prison in Warsaw.

After three weeks in confinement at Warsaw, Pan Rodzinski sent for me again. With an oily air of apology, he told me I had been the victim of a "miscarriage of justice". Now I was set free. That is, I was free to get out of Poland in twenty-four hours. They would take me back to Gdynia and put me on the first foreign-bound boat.

On a sailing barque, a German fishing smack, and still in a daze from my Polish experiences, I reached Danzig. Strange to say, my agitation about Wanda had not been beaten out of me but, rather, confirmed by the hardships suffered. I had had no word from her and knew nothing, not even if my letters reached her. Perhaps from Danzig one might get through. I decided to stay a while in the Free City. My consulate lent me a few marks for lodging.

I began hunting work, first in the Langfuhr quarter, a neat, bourgeois suburb inhabited by people with impassive faces and imperious gestures. They told me indifferently that it was my



own fault if I was out of work. Then I sought out the stevedores at the port, but jobs there were as scarce as among the Langfuhr bourgeois.

The Free City of Danzig was quiet compared to Gdynia. "To let" signs abounded as in other German cities. Idle steamers, moored side by side, cast reflections on the drab waters; they had not stirred for months. Dockyard hands and seamen loitered on the water front and before the Gothic façades of old buildings. At last I found work helping a Greek peddler from Cyprus sell his sponges. Going from house to house, I discerned everywhere the same misery as in Germany. Occasionally I sold a sponge to some dweller in privileged Langfuhr. I rang thousands of bells and knocked on countless doors. Some days I picked up enough to buy a pound of bread, a bit of margarine and a plate of cabbage soup. At my lodgings I shared a room with several anæmic derelicts. They rose early, brushed their clothes, polished their shoes, and went out to walk the streets with little hope of work or improved conditions.

At last I despaired of Wanda and was ready to return to Paris, but the French consul withheld my visa till he could look up my record in Paris and Warsaw. In retrospect the recent months seemed a nightmare—the more unreal and horrible because I had been forced to part with my illusions of Wanda.

I put in hours at the Danzig Public Library. The rooms were packed with people bending over heavy volumes and breaking the silence only to unwrap sandwiches. Hundreds spent their days reading here; the place was heated and a bitter wind beat outside. People talked to me of the odd terms on which Germans and Poles were collaborating. Poland's role was to keep order in the East and enforce the policies of London and Paris beyond the Vistula, while Germany had to submit to the arbitrary decisions of the International Commission that was governing Danzig. It bred hatred on either side of the German-Polish frontier. The Germans called the Poles swine, and the Poles earned their hatred by endlessly discriminating against the German minorities, as they did against Byelo-Russians, Ukrainians and Jews. Nationalist hate was written on both German and Polish faces.

This dislike extended to me doubly as a Russian and a Greek. I was presently informed that I must leave the Free City. A peddler's work-card was denied me and my employer was threatened with having his work-card withdrawn, though he had followed his occupation for many years. I redoubled my efforts to obtain a French visa. To Wanda I sent a last



few notes. By the time the snow began to fall, I was forced to recognize that I was not included in Wanda's future plans. I had but one desire; to get away from this execrable Baltic port as quickly as possible.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

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WITH SOME ELATION I had received the French consul's consent to return to Paris, but, once back, I found the situation little better than at Danzig. My uncle's family had moved to Nice; they were my only relatives in Paris. There was the same problem of the work-card.

I prowled like a hungry dog through the Paris streets, my shoes worn down to the uppers. Thanks to my experience in the Russian revolution, the physical sensation of hunger was no novelty. But in Russia there had been famine and all were hungry alike.

Now I suffered not only from hunger and deprivation. I was back in Paris where every street, every face and acquaintance reminded me of Wanda. During my struggles in Warsaw and Danzig I had occasionally forced myself to forget her. Here she came alive. Here we had loved each other. There was Montparnasse, Rue Bréa, the small hotel where we lived; the Rue de la Grande Chaumière and the little Polish restaurant whose proprietor had welcomed *monsieur et madame* so warmly, the café in the Rue de la Cité where we spent our first evening together. But now I was alone, poor and miserable.

It was a few days before New Year. The stores were packed with merchandise and from the fancy pastry shops came an enticing odour of hot *brioques* and *croissants*. Holiday shopping was in full swing. Polite clerks were wrapping white and multi-coloured boxes for well-dressed customers to carry away.

It was about six o'clock; the electric signs were mirrored on the wet pavements and crowds were pouring out of the



Metro. There were meetings, embraces and departures arm in arm. A beggar began arguing with me, personally aggrieved at the government's recent transactions with the Banque de France affecting the value of gold. Giving him a cigarette, I managed to extricate myself.

I walked down the Boulevard des Batignolles to the Place Clichy. Perhaps I might meet an acquaintance in one of the bars on the Rue Pigalle. A fellow Russian might take me to a café in return for an errand I could do for him. The fantastic illuminated letters of the Citroen sign were reflected in the wall of a *pissoir*. A fine rain continued to fall, as it did for six months of the year in Paris. Through the plate glass of the Citroen showroom I could see the motor-car salesmen in all the perfection of their type—well-combed hair, small neat moustaches, erect bearing. They were staring out at the street, twiddling their thumbs, for there were no customers.

The taxi-drivers' hangout at the corner was full of the usual crowd. It served for eight francs a bountiful table d'hôte: boiled beef with potatoes, *salade Normande*, soup, cauliflower and half a litre of *pinard*. My mouth watered. Regretfully I weighed my ten francs; they represented ten coffees with cream and ten croissants. I turned to cross the street, still thinking of that hot meal. The headlights of a big car glared in my face and I narrowly missed being hit.

People were sauntering around in the Place Clichy. Passing Dupont's I saw Ginette, my latest Montmartre affair, with a big fellow. They sat at the bar with their *aperitifs* before them. The man had a thick raw-looking face and his arm was upon Ginette's elbow. I couldn't blame the girl; she had to eat. At the Place Blanche, opposite the brightly lighted Moulin Rouge, an accordionist and a singer had collected a crowd. The singer wore a black hat and was shouting hoarsely something about "*les violettes impériales*". A song sheet was handed me with a demand for two francs; I returned it and was roundly cursed.

As I walked down Rue Blanche a stream of Hispanos, Rolls-Royces, and Bugattis rolled by, delivering their fashionable occupants to night resorts. The headlights garishly illuminated the crude make-up of street-walkers. The air was heavy with the odour of peanuts and chestnuts roasting. The wooden counters across the brightly lighted Moulin Rouge were loaded with Brie, Camembert and Roquefort cheeses jumbled pell-mell with *Chocolat Menier*, Marseilles soap, and heaps of sardine tins.



Before the door of the Boccaccio stood Muradov in his Cossack tunic, a black band over his bad eye, his good one on the alert to see cars approaching his door. As a limousine pulled up in the narrow street, he threw the door open with a few words of Russian for "atmosphere". It was the dinner hour and the narrow Rue Pigalle was blocked with the big cars. Inside, orders were being taken for *shashlik* and *cotelettes de volaille*. Scandinavian and American women, as they came out to their cars, glanced appreciatively at Muradov's imposing features and proportions. The burly Cossack never failed to strike, in the sleek breasts of these women, secret chords which continued vibrating as they drove away with their rheumatic or gouty husbands.

After the defeat of Denikin's army, Muradov had been evacuated on a French warship and had then followed the usual itinerary of exile—Gallipoli, Constantinople, Marseilles and Paris—until Colonel Ermolov, who had known him in Gallipoli, and who was now head waiter at the Boccaccio, got him his job of doorman. Muradov had been a private in his White army days, but now he had been promoted by the other doormen and the prostitutes that plied the street. "Hello, Captain," they would shout when they found him ensconced at the bar and drinking his *Rossi a l'eau* in the *bureau de tabac* opposite the Boccaccio.

Now a limousine was pulling up. "Bastards! Let 'm wait," growled Muradov to me. His Russian words as he opened the door would have been thought even more colourful if they had been understood.

"Lend me a couple of francs, Muradov," I demanded when the last car had sped around the corner.

"Have you got a good story to-day?"

Digging into my treasury of archaic anecdotes, I found a two-franc story for Muradov. "An Armenian, a Turk and a Georgian got together on Mount Ararat——" I began.

Muradov's face was already widening into a grin when a taxi drew up to the door, discharging two smart, smiling women in a cloud of expensive scent.

"Twenty francs," said the taxi-driver, rolling the *r*.

I would have recognized that accent anywhere. It was Alesha—Alexeyev except to intimates—with whom I often played chess in the back room of Chez Titine after four o'clock when he'd put up his taxi. He came of a military family and had been educated before the war at a Swiss lycée.

"Alesha. I've not eaten since morning."



"Jump in. We'll both have supper."

"Hey!" yelled Muradov after us. "My story!"

I stuck my head out of the window of the cab. "The Georgian was the loser! Thanks for the two francs, Muradov!"

Alesha was the only man I could share my troubles with. He knew my story—how deeply I had been hurt by Wanda. As we drove to the restaurant in his taxi, he tried again to convince me that it had all been for the best; our two worlds were entirely different. But at twenty I was still an optimist. I could not understand why two young human beings couldn't simply love each other.

With a good plate of soup before me and a bottle of red wine I took courage again. Near us two prostitutes and their pimps were reckoning up the afternoon's takings. "Oh, no, no, keep off her beat or there'll be a row."

The pimp tapped the table nervously with a much beringed finger. His speech was southern—Cannebière or Ajaccio. The women were no longer young. They wiped their plates neatly with crusts of bread, rolled up their napkins and slipped them into wooden rings, showing they were permanent customers and ran accounts.

"Two *babas au rhum*," echoed the man behind the little bar.

Then Lisa came in. An Alsatian with German features, she spoke German better than French. During the French occupation of the Rhine she had kept company with a Zouave corporal. Her home city abhorred the foreign troops quartered there and had not forgiven her when she became pregnant. One Sunday the curé, in the course of his sermon, quite simply drove her from the church. After that, women turned their backs on her in the shops of her neighbourhood. The baby died a few months later. After bringing Lisa to Paris, the Zouave walked out on her, leaving a note that said he was called back to his regiment at Fez. Lisa worked at a dress-making establishment for a while at a few hundred francs a month. A Corsican gigolo got her a place as barmaid at a Viennese night club. There she met a girl from Cologne, who introduced her to cocaine. Now her eyes were glassy and her nostrils were stained purple from the drug. When she ran out of cocaine she would sell herself at any price. In her room were pictures of her father—a man with long moustaches, wearing a Landwehr uniform—and of the fatal corporal who was well set up and had melting brown eyes. Lisa liked to talk German with me. We had much in common. Living



in nocturnal Paris our thoughts were far away. That night she came in rather unsteadily, her eyes very bright.

Aravanian had not showed up yet. An Armenian who sold cocaine, morphine and hashish in this quarter, he dressed dashing and was always to be seen with chic women, sometimes foreigners. There was a large solitaire on his little finger, a stone of at least five carats. An over-protuberant nose had drawn the flesh so that his eyes squinted. He had the reputation of being a *type dangereux*, but was on excellent terms with the *Préfecture de Police*, politicians and with other men of his sort, who oiled their hair, wore glittering stones, and addressed him as "Nick". His guttural speech was authoritative.

Lisa kept watching for Nick's arrival and making nervous gestures. She ordered black coffee. Alesha took his leave. Leaning on the wine-spotted tablecloth, I shrank into my corner to escape the manager's notice, having no other place to go. My room at the hotel had been double-locked by the owner, who warned me not to bother to come back till I had at least fifty francs. His stubbly cheeks were purple with anger when he learned I had managed to slip in one night while he was showing a couple upstairs. He had been gassed in the war and anger made him swell up and cough. Whenever I asked for my key he inquired of his wife whether Number 2 had paid up. He preferred letting his rooms by the hour, so there was much checking in and out; one heard the *bidet* flush and then feet coming down the stairs. By the day his price was eight francs. He lived in the basement with his wife, whom he often beat. I would hear his shouts and her cries. "Dirty slut! Did I take you from that brothel at Rouen just for you to park your fanny here and do nothing?"

One day the postman remained longer than was needed to deliver a letter. A dreadful scene resulted. The wife was about forty and must once have been pretty. Now she cooked, scrubbed the toilets, and went to the movies once a week with her husband. The couple thought of themselves as respectable citizens.

When the other clients had left, Lisa beckoned to me. Nick had not appeared. "You must find him," she said. "He's sure to be in some bar on the Butte Montmartre. I've got to have half a grain—and no salt!" She slipped me a few notes.

I found Nick. Towards twelve, I knocked on her door. She had a customer for the night and I could not stay there. But she handed me a five-franc tip.

The lights were still bright in the Rue Pigalle before the



Château Caveau Caucasien. Young chaps with girls in décolleté were talking Oxford English. All were half drunk.

"Cheerio, General," they shouted, extending their hands in farewell to the bearded doorman in Caucasian uniform.

Usually I waited for the place to close up at 5 a.m. Then I would be able to sleep a few hours in the room of one of the waiters. But to-night I strolled toward Les Halles, where rooms were only three francs. I was toughened to these long excursions from one end of the city to the other. How well I knew Paris at closing time!—the belated revellers in formal dress, carrying canes; the cheapest prostitutes who appeared in the morning hours, hoping to find some men drunk enough to be uncritical of their faces and ill-lighted rooms. Taxi-drivers dozed at their wheels, newspapers dangling from relaxed hands. . . . Bicycle cops made their indifferent rounds.

Les Halles was a scene of activity. Lorryloads of vegetables, cheeses and fruits were arriving by all the gates of Paris—crates of Smyrna figs, olives from Volo, cheeses from Calvados. Loaded with fresh turnips and carrots, carts picked their slow way, the driver leading his horse and clenching his teeth on his pipe in impatience, shouting, "*Merde!*" at every other step.

I stopped at a little restaurant famous for serving the best onion soup in Paris for two francs. The matronly owner did not glance at me, but looked sharply at some American newcomers—they pronounced the French for "onion" so queerly.

"This way, Jeanne," she told the waitress, contriving an opening between two tables crammed with rosy-cheeked market folk. "This way! Four soups and white wine."

There was talk to and fro between tables. Tradesmen argued about the new taxes. The Americans finished quickly and were off in their relentless hunt for a "good time". They must gobble up Paris in a week, from the Place Vendome to Versailles and from Versailles to the Rue Blondel. They were taking notes with red and green fountain pens in pocket notebooks to show friends in Wisconsin or Missouri. They all seemed to write the same hand, wear the same hat, suit, spectacles and shoes, and employ the same phrases and exclamations.

A political argument was developing at the bar. A stocky fellow was holding forth, caressing his moustache with thick black-nailed fingers.

"Briand—makes me sick. I wipe my ass with his theories. Traitor to the working class! Smooth guy. Bourgeois socialist,



pimp. Capitalism is rotten, I tell you! Who was it that had to fight the war? Hell, it was us, the proletarians!"

He opened his trousers to display a scarred lower abdomen to a scrawny bald fellow in black who sported a bowler. Our hostess intervened.

"Have it your own way but don't take off your trousers. Not in here."

"Four years we broke our necks for them and they're still out to get our last penny. *Messieurs les Socialistes!*" shouted the stocky man. "*Oui*, and now the United States—they're going to skin us, too!"

The little chap in the bowler pointed out that, after all, the Americans had come and helped. But by then his friend was picking a fight with a man in a torn coat and red-striped jersey, whom he accused of being a jackal of Chiappe, the famous police chief of Paris. Someone proposed a toast to Marcel Cachin. The market contingent made a wry face at that, but refrained from mixing in. An American was laughing with all the capacity of his very wide jaws and kept saying, "You bet you, you bet you, that's fun."

A blind man, whose dog lay crouched under his table, was condemning the injury done to the feelings of the masses. His black spectacles ill concealed the two holes behind them; it was like eloquence from a skull. I picked up a newspaper someone had left behind. Cheap scandals filled its columns. Some maharajah had taken the Grand Prix at Auteuil and been given the Legion of Honour; he was photographed in the company of the winning horse and a cabinet minister. An actress had insured her legs for some fantastic amount, a showgirl was suing a millionaire. In disgust I threw down *Le Journal*, paid for my coffee, and withdrew to a three-franc bed.

The water jug was covered with cobwebs and the place stank, but I slept until late afternoon. Then a knock on the door roused me to another round of boulevards—and people who recoiled in alarm when they saw my hungry look.



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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

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AT THE EARNEST recommendation of a dancer at the Château Caveau Caucasiën, who was a friend of Muradov's, I was finally engaged by a young man named Lucien as a sort of valet and private secretary. My salary was five hundred francs a month, and my duties included answering Lucien's phone, taking memoranda, keeping his engagements straight, looking after his laundry and occasionally pressing a tie or a pair of pants. I welcomed the work with all my heart, as it saved me from taking up quarters under the *ponts de Paris*.

Soon I found out that he was a gigolo. About four o'clock in the afternoon he would rise and take his morning shower, getting ready for five o'clock. When he thrust his pale effeminate hand through the shower curtains, I would be standing by to give him a towel. He took more than an hour to dress. A quantity of little flasks and jars with pomades, pastes, and lotions were arrayed on his Louis XVI dressing table. Clad in a dressing gown of yellow silk, embroidered with Chinese dragons, he would sit before his circular mirror studying each separate lash of his languorous black eyes. His body was soft and white. Each day he would give a hundred languid brush-strokes to his long curly hair. Lucien was a thing of beauty, whom post-war pleasure-seeking females were eager to endow.

His father was a minor bank employee in Reval. His mother had spoiled him because he was handsome, and allowed Lucien to leave school at fifteen, to the satisfaction of his teachers, who had found him both lazy and sly. He went into the ballet corps of the opera. The ballerinas adored him and he aroused the special interest of the première danseuse, a woman of forty. She decided the other ballet folk were a bad influence on the boy, so she withdrew him from circulation and kept him as her lover for two years, spending half her salary on his whims.

One day, after dancing a sinuous tango with Lucien, the

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wife of a foreign diplomat proposed to him. Their elopement precipitated a cabinet crisis at Reval. Lucien's father suddenly was given a rise, and the home-town papers prophesied a brilliant future for his youthful son. The "honeymoon" on the Riviera lasted several months; at its termination the lady gave Lucien a substantial cheque and returned to her husband, who was promptly transferred to Siam in the hope that his wife might be more restrained in her relations with Orientals.

Henceforth, ballet exercises were too exhausting for Lucien. He could make money dancing the tango. He accepted any gift that represented a substantial value, from American Express cheques and cash to cigarette cases and jewels. He danced professionally at the Casanova, whose wealthy customers could and would pay anything for a night of his elegant embraces. He had quarters near the Bois, drove a de luxe Delage convertible and banked at the Champs Elysées branch of the Credit Lyonnais.

At the moment, he was having an affair with a sexagenarian from St. Louis, whose husband, a manufacturer of rubber heels, had just died and left her his accumulated wealth. She was living on the Avenue Henri-Martin where so many rich women dwelt, women who enjoyed making a parade of their dukes, Georgian princes and Russian generals and confessing—while they exchanged impressions of various *boites de nuit*—how much they spent monthly on their gigolos. This was a regular item of expense along with food, wine, perfumes, jewellery and rent. They were wonderfully energetic, these ladies; they rode, did the museums, danced the tango and Charlestoned to the more lively music of jazz conductors. They drank heavily, wrote perpetual cheques, christened monuments to the war dead with their extra bottles of champagne, attended divine worship at a fashionable church and then set out for Vichy to take reducing cures. Or often they wound up in some sanatorium for alcoholism. They would all tell you, in execrable French, that they traced their ancestry back to the *Mayflower* and just adored the British nobility. They loved bright colours and covered walls of their salons with the inferior works of surrealist painters, whom they rated in the ratio of their personal magnetism. It must have been a wonderful change for them, after a quarter century or more with a dull, purposeful husband who wanted his ham and eggs at exact intervals and took his wife with the same regularity, though certainly less often than he went to a good baseball game. And now the exchange



rate was so advantageous, and they had so much inhibited tenderness to lavish!

Lucien had only to whisper of financial difficulties, while dancing with some generous lady. How could he think of making love with all his pecuniary troubles? As Lucien sighed, the mere promise of enchanted nights added ciphers to his bank balances.

He had his usual vile anecdote to tell me while dressing. After reddening his lips he draped his dainty legs in silken drawers and selected a 4,000-franc suit from Barclay Taylors. His wardrobe included some thirty suits, silk shirts by the dozen and a wide selection of handsome dressing gowns.

Though a child in many respects, Lucien was remarkably shrewd in exploiting his own value. He could generally tap two or three sources at the same time; at the moment a Swedish woman from Malmö was helping the St. Louis millionairess to support him. This keeping track of his engagements involved an elaborate system of lies and evasions. At last destiny struck, and I mixed up the dates. There was an awful showdown between St. Louis, Malmö, and Lucien. I was fired.

My account of the Paris of this epoch from the viewpoint of one driven to parasitism by the lack of a work-card would be incomplete without a description of a Russian resort where I worked as *plongeur* after my secretarial duties were so abruptly terminated. The establishment—call it one of a dozen—opened its doors at 6 p.m. At seven the waiters deployed among the tables, clad in Russian blouses with eagles appliquéd on the chests and bearing torches as they distributed Caucasian *shashlik*, *cotelettes de volaille à l'impériale*, and *breast of mutton Romanov*. In one corner a customer who had ordered music was beset by a gypsy orchestra that demanded a tip after each number, for the open palm was the rule of life here. Young Sonia, lavishly made up and wearing a neat tailored dress, readily admitted she preferred Frenchmen and Americans to Russians because, as she said, "They have the sous". Our gypsy prima donna, an ancient dame, ingeniously frescoed but hoarse from excessive drinking, took the same stand.

Men and women alike sold themselves, but especially their cherished pasts and colourful lies. For a few glasses of vodka they would spew out their tragedies to passing strangers—the horrors of the Revolution, the atrocities of the Reds. These anecdotes pleasantly tided over the interval between *hors d'oeuvre* and coffee, while the American or English tourists



would exclaim, "But how incredible! How revolting!"

There was always a Caucasian dancer throwing daggers and crying himself hoarse with "Allah, Allah!" in addition to a gypsy ensemble and ballet soloist. The *maître d'hôtel* went from one table to another and lighted the candles. It was alleged that he was of the old nobility, a member of the Imperial Guard. All dancers were Georgian princes. Every customer that entered was carefully studied and the right harpies were dispatched to encourage him to go the limit on champagne. The waiters were clever at slipping empty bottles under the table to swell the count. If a customer protested, he was put in the position of doubting a nobleman's word. Generally he was glad to be cheated when it was whispered to him that the cheat was absolutely the fourth cousin of a grand duke.

In reality, the proprietor was an obscure ex-comedian from a small town in the south of Russia. Now he spoke familiarly of the Moscow Art Theatre and claimed Stanislavsky and Moskvina as cronies. Bald and cold-eyed, he was said to be a converted Jew who had been in the service of the Tsarist secret police at Odessa before the revolution. Still "loyal and devout", he hung ikons and portraits of the Tsar and royal family in his office behind the kitchen. His wife was always making scenes in public because of his flirtations with the guests. She had washed dishes and scrubbed floors during their stay in Constantinople and prostituted herself to Turks so that her husband could have three meals a day. She had been a ballad singer and had introduced him to the backer of his night club.

Two card-reading fortune tellers squabbled over customers; each was so repellent that patrons often asked if there were no younger women around. Every member of the staff had his personal intrigues that bred hatreds, many of which had been kept up ever since Gallipoli, Constantinople or Belgrade. Nevertheless, they invariably addressed one another by their titles. The cook's brother, an old general, was "Your Excellency". He often sat till morning at the table nearest the entertainers, drinking tea and talking about the old days when he had governed a province. Since he was hardly up to his current job of administering four billiard tables at a club, his story only made the revolution more explicable. All the same, his forked beard was imposing.

When the doors closed, the staff adjourned to a bistro across the street to drink coffee and weep on each other's bosoms until dawn. Sunday you could see them all kneeling,



crossing themselves and praying fervently at the Russian church in the Rue Daru. Then they joined the Holy Synod contingent at a little bar in toasts to old Mother Russia, the Tsar and the Cyril Romanov faction. These men delighted in news of famine in Russia, kulak revolts in Georgia and the depredations of Cossacks and Japanese in Siberia. They imbibed enormous quantities of vodka with herring and cucumber and as they drank they grew hilarious about the great days of the Civil War. Exchanging tales of cavalry charges, pogroms and mass executions, their eyes brightened, and their fingers toyed with imaginary silver poignards at their belts. Vodka imparted a cheering glow to the past; and they saw again the pine thickets, marching men in psychological attacks and the bulbous cupolas of the churches.

Booted Cossacks in blue uniforms, members of a touring chorus, leaned against the bar, talking hopefully of an approaching invasion of Russia, discussing Kutypov's latest speech and rehearsing Mussorgsky's "God have mercy on us".

"More *pirojki*!" one would shout. "Come—just one more little vodka! To the good old times."

The atmosphere became heavy. . . .

Sober middle-class Frenchmen and women in their Sunday best strolled past these Russian hangouts on the Rue Daru. Shaking their heads they would murmur dubiously:

"These Russians!"







PART FOUR

FROM SWASTIKA TO HAMMER  
AND SICKLE

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*CHAPTER THIRTY*

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"ALL OUT! Zoo Station, Berlin."

I roused myself from a doze. To my numerous worries in Paris another had been added—a sudden telegram from our family lawyer recalling me to Berlin. My mother was seriously ill in a Vienna hospital and my signature was required on certain legal papers. Luckily Dr. Müller had wired me enough money for a third-class ticket.

When I visited his tiny office in Potsdamerstrasse, Dr. Müller—the relentless lawyer who had been my cicerone on the journey to Schwarzburg—made it beautifully clear that my mother had no more money; and that my stepfather had departed after the last penny had been spent to seek greener pastures. The result had been a nervous breakdown and the illness which had hospitalized my mother in Vienna. Of course, I wanted to join her there, and asked Dr. Müller for money to make the trip. The lawyer spread before me the debit columns and declining balances of her accounts for years back emphasizing that there was no money; everything had gone in gaming, speculation and high living; he himself had not been paid for his last year's services. My plea that he help me find work was of no more avail. Neither my two baccalaureates nor my utter physical and mental exhaustion made any impression on him. Dr. Müller was a business man—and I was a penniless foreigner. Pressing a twenty-mark note into my hand, he dismissed me and wished me luck.

I decided to remain in Berlin. Starving in Berlin, starving in Paris—what was the difference?



The years had made changes in Berlin. New stores and dazzling resorts invited expenditure and promised enjoyment. A heyday of building had been stimulated by English and American loans. The pretext was to relieve unemployment and so fortify the barrier against "Red Muscovite barbarism". Everywhere vast brick, cement and stone buildings had sprung up. There were huge bridges, inordinately large stadiums, vast industrial plants and superb apartment houses in the *vornehmer Westen*. Yet like Potemkin's villages it seemed to be all sham: millions of unemployed languished in the midst of these splendours. Thin, pale, neat and hungry, unemployed white-collar workers extended their soft, imploring hands. And there were others too, with upturned coat collars and calloused palms telling of a life-time of hard work, whose self-respect was visible in its last refuge—well-polished shoes.

Meanwhile, on the political scene, acts of violence had hardly ceased since the formation of the Workers and Soldiers' Councils in 1918. In 1921 Ehrhardt's assassins made their attempt on Scheidemann. In 1922 they killed Walther Rathenau. While the reactionaries were gathering strength, blood flowed in the Ruhr, there were revolts at Halle, Magdeburg, in Thuringia and at Hamburg. On the Right there were the Stahlhelm, the German war veterans led by Seldte and Düsterberg; the National Socialist Party led by Hitler; and the radical Rightists led by the brothers, Gregor and Otto Strasser. All these represented the growing alliance between the Junkers and finance capital. On the Left were the Social Democrats and Communists, while the Centrists, Catholics and Agrarians took an inconclusive middle-road position that played into the hands of the reactionaries.

And while this complex, desperate political struggle went on, the whole life of post-war Germany, its literature, theatre, cinema, arts, painting and manners, reeked of sensationalism, hedonism, infatuation, eccentricity and immorality, with all their ramifications and accompanying manifestations. Alcoholism, drug-taking, sadism, masochism, homosexuality, every sort of perversion and aberration reached a peak, as did crime in general.

In Berlin's Martin Lutherstrasse there were four homosexual and two lesbian resorts, and one where shots of morphine were administered behind the bar. In elegant cafés they would serve you cocaine on the same plate as your sugar, and hashish was sold openly. Homicidal monsters sprang up everywhere, like Haarmann, the Düsseldorf killer. The shell-shocked,



gassed and deranged packed hospitals, psychiatric wards and asylums. The astrologer Hanussen's clairvoyance and Hitler's hallucinations made rival claim for the attention of the hysterical mob.

The cinema reflected the joyless sensuality of the period. Extremes were cultivated in politics, philosophy and the arts. The museums hung canvases by psychotics and paranoiacs. Similarly syphilitics and neurasthenics—pale, powdered skeletons with dilated pupils—created literary furores by reciting farcical verses, figments of their insanity. Berlin drew Europe's perverse or decadent types like a magnet. The cheapest whores from Marseilles and Paris leapt aboard the North Express and got out at Friedrichstrasse, the great bull market of pleasure.

Meanwhile I was studying want ads in the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Morgenpost*. One could buy anything on credit, take dancing lessons or massage treatments at fifty pfennigs an hour. But of work there was none.

I tried everything. First I was a salesman of Electrolux appliances. But those who had money did not care to buy from a foreigner. Then I tried to sell motor cars and trucks. Every morning about six I set out for the slaughter-houses on a hunt for customers. There I found the big live-stock operators drinking beer and counting their gains. After months of effort, I sold two Mercedes trucks. Delighted at this success, which opened up new horizons in the business world, I borrowed a hundred marks from the company. However, it developed that the benevolent signer of this order had gone through several bankruptcies and credit was refused. On top of that I had worn out the one suit presentable enough to receive customers at the showroom. The sales manager called me in and fired me, explaining that business was very bad, that preference must be given to German employees and that, furthermore, I was in debt to the company for 132 marks and 63 pfennings on my drawing account.

After this fiasco I tried to tutor in French and to get translating work. It was a miserable life and brought in virtually nothing. I sold cigarettes at a night club on Geisbergstrasse, where lesbians consorted in little arched alcoves. During the daytime I slept in one of the girls' rooms. Hansi had a man's voice; she made up elaborately and wore a bow-tie with her smart *tailleur*. I gave her Russian lessons because she was having a liaison with a Russian married woman, whom she received at her place. I spent my nights in Martin Luther-



strasse and came to know all the male and female prostitutes from Wittenberg to Nollendorf Platz.

At the Eldorado, a homosexual resort, I was taken on as a chucker-out. At the second whistle from the barman, I would burst into the room, grab my man by the slack of the neck and the seat of the trousers, propel him to the door and shoot him out on the pavement with a boot in the tail. It amused me and kept me in trim. About 6 a.m. I joined other chuckers-out at a beer joint and we compared batting averages. I was then living with Elsa, a slight blonde girl addicted to cocaine, who was hat-check girl at the establishment where I worked. At the Eldorado I encountered many youths who were later among the élite of the SS; young Baron von Hammer in particular and Freiherr von Cramm, the tennis player, were habitués. But I could not stand this atmosphere long and soon I set out to sell silk stockings and perfumes. Two Russians had a scent shop on Joachimthalerstrasse. They gave me a few phials to sell on commission. I made the rounds of the resorts, whispering: "Contraband stuff!" in the ears of drunken customers. Their girls urged them to buy and they bought. The girls got the presents, and, later on, a split.

All I wanted was a few marks, enough for three meals a day and regular lodgings. I was tired of living with women who had to turn me out of bed in the middle of the night to make way for some drunken provincial out for a lark in Berlin. The crazy disorder of such experiences left a bitter after-taste. And nothing I did then could erase the memory of Wanda from my mind. Elsa, Hansi, Frieda—all had the same story. Modelling for some textile industry in the Spittelmarkt, they had been taken out to dinner by the owner, were given a rise of a few marks—and then had slid swiftly down to Martin Lutherstrasse amid silk hose and imported cocktails. Hansi liked to listen to my yarns; we often sat on together in cafés long after the other patrons had left and the washerwoman was cleaning up, not leaving until the last cigarette box was in the dustpan and dawn shed a spectral light on Berlin's post-war pleasure street.

Reading, visits to museums, and self-improvement were not wholly crowded out, but a certain resistance was needed if one were not to bog down in the night life of Martin Lutherstrasse. Hungry half the time and in a mental turmoil because of Wanda and everything else that had happened, I simply lacked this resistance. Often acquaintances of my family turned up there in exuberant parties. The famous actor Mosjoukine



would be driven up in a big Cadillac convertible coupé with a train of acolytes and demi-mondaines. At such moments my fists clenched convulsively and I tried to avoid being recognized. However, I was once spotted, as I was selling my "contraband" scents, by Alfred Rehkatsch, one of my schoolmates from Schwarzburg. He talked to me seriously of better times and fresh hopes and asked me to visit him. But when he started to lecture me about my way of life without offering anything better, I dismissed him and his empty promises.

➤ One day Hansi came down with gonorrhea. She named the culprit, a big lout with vitreous eyes and a mop of hair over his forehead. I managed to arrange a tête-à-tête with him and our conversation wound up in a sizable battle. He called in some friends, all members of the Stahlhelm; one of the gang, I later learned, was connected with the Alexanderplatz *Kriminal Polizei*. I managed to knock out three of my adversary's teeth before two cops clubbed me over the head. With a dislocated jaw I was shoved through police court proceedings. I drew eight days in prison. Most of my fellow convicts were political offenders—Nazis, Communists, unemployed demonstrators. One had kicked his shoe through a delicatessen window and made off with a sausage. Another had slipped underneath the portico of a Halensee residence out of curiosity to see how the rich dined, and then, maddened by savoury odours, got arrested attempting larceny.

When I came out Hansi bought me a cravat with green spots. Why? I never knew. In addition, since she could not now entertain customers, she offered me a month of uninterrupted slumber plus my meals. Gratefully I declined.

Some friends seriously advised me to become a professional boxer. But malaria had robbed me of stamina. Several rounds would leave me exhausted, and my athletic appearance was belied by the state of my heart. One day I ran into Kyril, now wearing glasses. He was returning to Moscow to enter the USSR consular service. He was working day and night and expected to be sent to a distant post in Asia. His father had died. The servants of the USSR die young from overwork, yet I envied his prospects. We spent the night together talking of old times in Schwarzburg. The years had made a gulf between us. Kyril belonged to the Soviet hierarchy of functionaries looking forward to a secure future; I was just an emigré. Anyhow, Kyril promised before he left to try to get me a Russian visa. He was unsuccessful.



I went home much depressed. By this time I was sharing a little room on Fasanenstrasse with another Russian, who soon faded out of my life as Kyril had done, but in a different direction. He was older than I and slept on the broken-backed divan. Two pairs of white slacks and a tennis racket were his entire fortune, but they proved to be enough. They enabled him to meet and marry the sister of the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm II, aged fifty or more. The name of Alexander Zubkov became famous. Once he passed me a fifty-mark note, but I heard of him after that only through newspapers, which made much of him and his racket for years.

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## *CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE*

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STIFF AND MOTIONLESS I sat for hours on a bench on Bayrischer Platz, staring aimlessly. I watched the children at play and the servant girls and nursemaids at their chatter. Around noon I would slip into a bakery and spend a few pfennigs for a couple of rolls, some cheese or Thuringian sausage. Then, hands in pockets, I would saunter down Innsbruckstrasse. Standing about in front of the coffee shop that faced the Hans Breitenstätter Athletic School were the youth of Berlin—men of my own age, without occupation. Many were embittered and lethargic. Others grabbed any opportunity that arose and often wound up in the Moabit prison for fraud or extortion.

In the squares and parks of North-east Berlin things were still worse. Hundreds waited there empty-eyed in their work caps, faded shirts and thin-soled shoes. Many had never known employment. Cheesy-faced and bow-legged from rickets, they were drawn at last into the nearest SA local, where they signed an application for membership in the National Socialist Party. This entitled them to an allotment of one mark per diem, free beer and decent clothes to their backs. Their elders scolded them in vain. Many an honest labourer who had been a Socialist all his life now saw his son in a brown shirt.



"You'll have to get used to it, Father," the young men said. "The government can't or won't help us. We've got to help ourselves." Talking of the beautiful Germany that would come when they had driven out the "exploiters"—by which these young men meant, with simple irrationality, Jews—their faces would take on colour and animation.

Poverty and wretchedness were increasing, and the "To Let" and "For Sale" signs multiplied in once-prosperous sections. Everywhere anxious hands were ransacking worn purses. A few pfennigs a day would go for heat, lodging and food—the last consisting of marmalade, ersatz coffee, a few grams of margarine, a bit of cabbage and potatoes—boiled potatoes, baked potatoes, potato soup. Sapless hands, year in and year out, wiped the table neatly, washed the dishes and ranged the plates in the family china closet. Around the paraffin heater and among the remaining sticks of furniture, beaten faces would pore over newspapers—and learn nothing but the irrelevant news that Stresemann had gone to see his "dear friend" Briand again.

Oh, well!

Then the neatly polished shoes and yellow celluloid collars would be donned, and while the wives furiously scrubbed and rescrubbed the floors and windowpanes, the menfolk would go out to beg in Budapesterstrasse and on the Kufürstendamm.

Much concern was being manifested about maintaining law and order in Wedding and Neukölln, the workers' suburbs. Hefty cops were always on patrol to make sure that nothing went wrong in the garrets and basements, where crying children, their legs crooked, their heads disproportionately large from malnutrition, begged their unemployed fathers to give them food. They were starving to death. Workers' wives with dry, fevered lips cast poisonous looks at these guardians of order, and slammed the windows shut with a curse. Many turned on the gas while their husbands stood with bowls in the soup queues, waiting for a meagre hand-out. Perhaps a few potatoes, a plate of soup, a scrap of bread at twenty pfennigs. All this was carefully taken home in a saucepan under the arm. With water added it could last two days. The police used their clubs freely. The Black Maria worked twenty-four hours. Prisons were jammed. The impervious police court capriciously distributed three-day to three-month sentences to the houseless, the jobless and to Communists. Attic and cellar were mutinous; Berlin workers saw red. Hope lay in radical change.

For many—and I must confess I was one—the National



Socialist movement, as exemplified by Otto Strasser's extremist group which was later liquidated, had a certain attraction. It seemed to be a workers' party. A veil of mysticism—or, possibly, mystification—was cast over ugly features in the Party's programme to disguise and make them alluring. It was easy to dream of salutary force directed to humanitarian ends, when it was clear that force in the hands of the Weimar regime was being chiefly employed to preserve the privileges of the capitalist class. The Nazis were clever enough to persuade young Germans that capitalist and Jew were synonymous terms; thus their anti-Semitic propaganda had real effect.

I was later to gain more insight than I had at this time into proletarian methods and aims. With the advantage of that insight I can look back and recognize the superior heroism of the young men who at this time were joining, not the National Socialist, but the Democratic front.

In any case persons starving and morally depleted, unless they have clearer vision than I had, are less apt to hear and respond to the challenge of the heroic than to tangible offers like a mark a day, a uniform and free beers. Any hand would have been grasped that extended such benefits. No need any more to wait in line at the little red building on Ludwig-Kirchstrasse for the fifty pfennigs per diem which Berlin allotted to destitute foreigners, and which a policeman handed me in the form of postage stamps along with caustic observations. The Nazis told us that while we aliens languished without hope of obtaining German citizenship, Jewish immigrants from Galicia were arriving in scores, paying a thousand marks for papers, and settling down in a few months as respected members of the community. My rancour was keen against them and the Weimar Republic.

As for earnings, my tutoring at the Russian school and the French lessons I gave brought next to nothing. My room was a filthy cell. My diet was thin soup and jam sandwiches. I had given up any hope of a regular job. I could no longer endure being lonely and single-handed, without friends or associates; bitterness had so far made headway against a lowering dietary regime that I was frantic for action and, quite simply, ripe for a brawl.

In these circumstances I was persuaded by some of the other teachers and pupils at the Russian school to join a White Russian youth organization which was not actually a part of the German National Socialist Party, but had an auxiliary connection with it. The uniform had special insignia on the epaulettes



and, instead of the German eagle, it bore on the sleeves narrow stripes in the colours of the old Russian flag. Like the others, we wore swastikas, only smaller. What interested me most, however, was that the daily allowance was as great as in the N.S.D.A.P. and uniforms, as well as beers, were free.

How far I had been reduced by the oppression of loneliness and hunger is apparent to me when I recall that I took this step at the special instance of two men who, as I now recall them, seem utterly repellent. Volkov, a stupid, gangling fellow with white-lashed, bloodshot eyes like a calf's, was the son of a White Guardist officer whom the Reds had captured and drowned with rocks tied round his neck. His mother had been the daughter of the Orthodox priest in some small community; she now took in washing and sewing, and practised as a midwife and clairvoyant, in order to smooth her son's path. His atrocious treatment of her was an instance of his inherent brutality. My other sponsor, Schmidt, a mixed German and Russian, was the offspring of a Baltic cloth salesman. He claimed that the Jews had ruined his father's career; that was his chief motive for joining the Party.

We three often went to the Geisbergstrasse beer hall; there former White Guardists wet their whistles along with German Nazis, drinking endless glasses of beer to the New Reich and "dear old Russia". Adolf said the White Guardists would be certain to aid in deposing the Red tyrants. Naturally, men who were veterans of the Berlin battle would be given every preference and would lead the life of Riley when they returned as conquerors to Russia. A red-bloused balalaika orchestra played "Troika, troika" repeatedly, and "Trink, Brüderlein! Trink!"

On Sundays Volkov came to fetch me at dawn. I dressed rapidly. The tram took us to the station. On the train, in a fourth-class compartment, were other members of our organization. We travelled beyond the outskirts of Berlin, past the garden colonies with wooden cabins that afforded Berlin workers Sunday relaxation. There they planted their cabbages and ate their sandwiches. Little black, white and red flags decked the cabins, proclaiming the political loyalties of their occupants.

Some hours' travel brought us to Zehden. A big Maybach car met us at the station and drove us to a large estate. Rittmeister Wilhelm von Flottow's domains were immense. He brought in quantities of cheap labour from Poland. With other contingents of young men, we began target practice. We were shown how to handle machine guns. The weapons bore the



label of the Potsdam armoury and appeared to be those of the Reichswehr. An officer was in command. We practised advancing under fire. After an abundant luncheon slaked with beer, Rittmeister von Flottow praised our zeal. Slender, erect, with thin lips, grey hair and always a monocle, he was a Prussian officer to his fingertips and the archetype of a Junker.

Then we were divided into sides and engaged in manoeuvres. Before dinner we all stood in formation; the Nazis dressed in brown shirts, we Russians in white ones with black trousers, chests out, eyes to the left, waiting to be inspected by Flottow and two other reserve officers. Passing down the ranks of their future conquering army, the inspectors talked among themselves and exchanged smiles, while glancing at the Russian contingent, that sometimes struck me as ironic. We were introduced to the use of the bayonet and of clubs, knives, brass knuckle-dusters, revolvers and ju jitsu.

As darkness fell, long tables were set up in the court of Flottow's place. While we ate, Flottow made speeches about the new Germany which was coming to birth; generally a delegate from one of the various nationalist organizations was present. Flottow was one of the organizers of the Stahlhelm, and one day he read us a congratulatory telegram from Seldte. Sometimes representatives of the Wehrwolf, a nationalist youth organization, were there. By ten we would have drunk countless beers, and our muscles would ache. Big-hipped farm girls, imported from Poland's western provinces, waited on us. We went strolling with them at convenient intervals after supper.

I put my arm around Marthe's waist. A buxom wench from Bromberg, she was paid 75 pfennigs for working twelve hours a day on Flottow's estate. She had powerful thighs and was surrounded by a nimbus of health and rural heartiness. She pulled me by the hair with her mannish hand and we tumbled in some warm hay enveloped in the atmosphere of manure and perspiration. I could see other booted legs and white calves passing by and could hear little cries, "Oh, no. Not now". Then silence.

Also there were Germanic rites. I recall one autumn day when the oak leaves were reddish yellow and nature was preparing for hibernation. Big hoops were set out in the court and casks of beer were piled up in a corner. As it grew dark the servants lighted the hoops, and Storm Troopers, drunk by that time, started to jump through the flaming rounds. By midnight everyone was in a frenzy. We seemed to be centuries



back, with the Teuton hordes, in the age of making sacrifice on the altars of Thor and Wotan. In the light of the burning bonfire Flottow's face wore an unforgettable expression. He had really a magnificent head. The leaping flames accented with heavy shadows his regular features, grey temples, great forehead, and—impeccable monocle. He had the male perfection of a Potsdam grenadier.

Flottow sprang from an old Prussian military and noble family. His forebears had all been officers and had served their Wilhelms and Fredericks—at Königgratz, at Sedan, and at Langemarck. A romantic figure with his long legs encased in riding breeches and boots, wearing a brown velvet jacket with snug wristbands, he was never seen in the company of women. Inheriting the tradition of the feudal knights of the Marienburg Order who defended the frontier against the Eastern hordes, he regarded Slavs as an inferior race. This prejudice affected his attitude towards me and other members of the Russian section.

We returned to Berlin drunk and tired from the training, singing and arguing. Pessimism prevailed. Young Germans were iconoclastic. There was one with very blond hair, a poker face, a mouth like a knife slash and piercing blue eyes, Kurt von Lüdecke. A theologian who had been expelled from Göttingen, he took part regularly in Flottow's drills. A few glasses of beer would release the wellsprings of his heresy.

"You'll see," he remarked. "In Hitler's new Germany all the self-righteous passions of our reactionary church will be squashed. The church, as it now exists, will be swept out along with the Jews. Henceforth we Germans will adhere to our destiny and the true deities of Valhalla. The real god is the god of conquest who is pouring out wine for us for the final assault on democratic strongholds. To nerve us for battle—the real stuff, these German gods!" His blond locks fell heavily over his square forehead. "But don't imagine they are anything like the Weimar, Versailles, and Roman Jesus, or the God they keep chattering about at Göttingen. Yes, they kicked me out. But I told them off, the damned hypocrites! Why in hell don't they read *The Myth of the 20th Century*? This is the German Aryan's bible. Bah, the Vatican and the damned Jew-Catholic Republic!" Here he lowered his voice confidentially.

"What we need is a higher birth rate." He winked. "Exactly! There'll be plenty of f—ing in the Third Reich. There'll be need of youth. Catholics—Centrist Party—what a laugh! Thinking they can return Germany to the Middle Ages when a man couldn't screw his wife without the priest's



permission and sex was the invention of the Devil! The hell with monks, nuns and preachers that won't procreate and won't let others—using 'holy church' to wipe out the German nation, making eunuchs of pure-bred Aryans! They made pigs of us and half-wits, pounding away at the devil under our belts. That's what brought Germany down—the monks and nuns and all that dishwater from the church and heresy and the Last Judgment. And then they call *us* medieval. The Last Judgment. That's what they'll get from *us*!"

He relapsed into wild grimaces and incoherent gestures. When the train rolled into the station he stooped, picked up his satchel, and was presently swallowed up in the gloom of a subway as in the ambiguous darkness he conjured up.

In the next few years such doctrines became Germany's new religion. Alfred Rosenberg's *Briefe* expressed them. The underlying aim of the Party theoreticians was to create a German dogma, a young people's cult in which love of fellow man should be subordinated to the supreme ideal: the glory of Party and Fatherland. Violent war was waged against Protestant and Catholic youth organizations. Those who understand why sex is linked with youthful religious-inflammability will be able to fathom the success of the system applied in the SA, especially if they will consider how the poverty of post-war Germany had blocked the natural channels of sex expression.

The concept of sin, fundamental to Christianity, was a stumbling block to Party orators. They explained endlessly that the early Christian idea of "original sin" was given point by the moral corruption of ancient Rome, for the Romans had neglected racial purity. In short, miscegenation was the specific sin that had destroyed them. However, to be German was to be sinless. Petty-bourgeois SA members went home scratching their heads. Race, party honour and the Führer were all the religion the Germans needed. The Greeks had been wrong to idealize a mere physical type; the bow-legged SA members had beautiful German souls, which was enough to raise the bodily form beyond cavil.

Erwin Römer, with his staring eyes and flat feet, was to be a priest of the new religion; he and my companion of the train journey, Kurt von Lüdecke, who was no beauty either by Greek or Nazi standards, were among the "philosophers" of the movement.

In France or any other nation with a powerful middle class, the triumph of such paganism is hardly conceivable. But Germany's middle class was being uprooted and, it must be



added, German paganism was especially tenacious and had never been entirely defeated. The cults of Loki and Freya have always been practised, especially in the province of Brandenburg. Now members of the SA were assembling under the oaks and lindens to give heed to the voices of their old German gods, and in an Oldenburg village they tore up the crosses in the village cemetery.

I was present at the marriage of Hans Günther of the SA. His bride belonged to a feminine Hitler group. The pagan rite was performed under Wotan's oak. Günther's Sturm were the witnesses and their leader performed the priest's role. The anti-Jewish and anti-Christian battle was one, since the Storm Troopers saw Christ as first of all a Jew. It was madness to adore the God of those very Jews who were "persecutors of the Führer".

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE MAN MOUNTING the rostrum was small and ugly and lame in one foot. Though he extolled the "comely, blue-eyed, fair Aryan race", his own skin was dark. His mouth stretched from ear to ear and released an uninterrupted stream of words. He talked of an élite predestined to govern the world. On either side of the platform I recognized the *Schöneberg Sturm*. Fritze Bunk, a big, broad fellow with hands in his belt, occasionally left the platform with other Brownshirts to deal with hecklers. The Sportpalast was crammed. Most of the Storm Troops of greater Berlin had come and brought parents and friends.

"Attack!" screamed the Gauleiter of the N.S.D.A.P. in Berlin, Dr. Goebbels. "Attack before the enemy even has time to turn round! Put him on the defensive, smite him, trample him! . . ."

The little man waved his arms wildly, beating the table so hard that the water glass and carafe turned somersaults. The excited crowd responded with cheers and laughter.

Then the Gauleiter lowered his voice, and in a sancti-



monious tone began talking about "our sacred German martyrs who fell in the battle for Berlin". I happened to be acquainted with one of those "heroes", Wittkowsky. Known as "Red Karl", he was merely another gangster whose profession as a locksmith had qualified him for housebreaking. His record as a National Socialist was highly equivocal, and his political views had nothing to do with it when he was found in a room on Grenadierstrasse with a bullet in his loins.

I had met Red Karl first at a meeting at Neukölln. The crowd had gone on drinking after the speaker left. Suddenly a whistle blew. Communists had surrounded the premises. Karl had been a member of the Communist Party before joining Nazi ranks. He went out shivering, but apparently found some old friends; he came back, signalled to us, and we passed out unmolested between ranks of frowning workers, whose heavy fists hung conspicuously from their short-sleeved work blouses.

Karl's murder occurred the day after he came out of the Moabit Prison. He had often been seen with Anna, a well-known barfly at the Mexican Bar on Alexanderplatz. His assassin was a pimp and killer who had been associated with Anna when she was dancing at the Wintergarten.

Naturally nothing was said of this at the gala evening in the Sportpalast . . .

That same evening, I went with Volkov to a beer place on Rankestrasse frequented by the lowest gangster element. Some students, in their shirtsleeves, were tipsily ordering more beers. The waitresses were crudely made up. Views of Riga and Reval hung on the walls. Many of the clients were Baltic Germans. A balalaika orchestra was playing and bortsh and vodka were served. Such Russian attractions were supervised by a big fellow known as "the Colonel". There was thick and loud talk and student songs were in progress when a drunken crowd in uniforms burst in. Volkov turned to the proprietor and raised a questioning eyebrow.

"You guessed it," said the latter. "It's the Wedding Sturm. Bunch of fatheads and rowdies!" he added.

It was Horst Wessel and his henchmen. They went into the back room, where Volkov and I were talking over our beers. Sitting with his legs spread wide, Horst Wessel started singing. Presently he broke off with a hysterical cry and flung his beer glass through a mirror.

"Damned swine!" he yelled at the noisy students. "When the SA sings there is silence, you pigs!"



He had cut his hand smashing the mirror. A free-for-all began. A bearded Russian waiter in a red blouse and the big "Colonel" dived under the bar. The students threw chairs. Clubs were produced. Wessel's henchmen were big and muscular. They removed their coats deliberately and rolled up their sleeves. The fight was protracted. Wessel's head was bleeding. Then the lights went out and there were cries of "Police!" The girls screamed, the men groaned. I had picked up a chair and was raining blows around me.

Such was my first meeting with Horst Wessel, paid trouble-maker, show-off, daredevil and sponger on women, who won fame by his courage and push and was to become the romantic martyr of National Socialism. He was invariably accompanied by a strong-arm squad, and once they got high enough he would hurl them in savage assaults on Communist strongholds. A pale, nervous type, he came of a good German bourgeois family and, like most of our generation, had passed his youth idling in the Berlin streets, smoking pfennig cigarettes and visiting the dives on the Alexanderplatz and Grenadierstrasse. He was not unprepossessing. After his father's death he flung himself wholly into the life of the *Lumpenproletariat* and became a marked, not to say notorious, character. He appealed to the peculiar taste of the women of these haunts—prostitutes are always reactionary—and was soon acquainted with all the pimps and spongers. He attempted to supplant, as protector of a prostitute, one Höhler, locally known as "Ali". Ali had no intention of yielding this soft berth, so he stuck a knife in Horst Wessel's back. The true story of his death is thus essentially the same as Red Karl's.

The SA, characteristically, dressed up the story, making out that Wessel had been slain by Communists. Horst Wessel became another consecrated Aryan martyr like Baldur the Beautiful, who, lacerated and bleeding to death from knife wounds, declined relief from a Jewish physician who happened to be on the spot.

Goebbels, in short, made the most of it. The song written about Wessel held equal rank with the national anthem in all official ceremonies. The tune was borrowed from a Communist song. The room where Wessel was killed by a pimp became a national shrine of the Third Reich, hung with wreaths, portraits of Hitler and Hindenburg, and a whole pious exhibition contrived by Goebbels' press service. Now Hitler youths flock thither to render homage. However, the prostitutes have been cleared out of the district, lest they give rise to wrong impres-



sions, or perhaps become instrumental in introducing some infection into the hermetically pure Aryan blood. Throughout Germany hundreds of plaques and monuments have been set up in honour of Wessel who was "foully slain by Communists".

I began to tire of my wretched nocturnal existence. Again I scanned the want ads in the *Morgenpost* and *Berliner Tageblatt*. But there were no regular jobs open. I spent hours in beer halls. Sometimes a few drinks made me stop worrying for a while. But there was no escaping the grey light of Berlin's sombre dawn, with ever fresh newspaper headlines underscored in red, announcing more slaughters, more demonstrations, more street fighting in the slums.

What often surprised me was the indecision and lack of organization of the Republican youth of the Democratic Reichsbanner, which only much later organized the Iron Front and the "*Hammerschaften*" of Social Democracy. Though they had the support of the government and the police, they often let themselves be dispersed by a mere handful of Brownshirts. One day, over a couple of brandies, Willi Lehmann, a sympathetic youth, member of the Social Democratic "*Gewerkschaften*", told me of the lack of enthusiasm and support they received. He was being sent with a delegation to collect money in the rich textile quarter, Spittelmarkt. Everywhere they got the same answer: "No money for your street battles and your hooliganism. The police and the Reichswehr will defend the Republic for us". The business men, even the Jewish ones, were complacent and credulous. They were finding life good in these post-war years. They lived in magnificent apartments at the Grönewald, ate at Horcher's, and took the cure at Baden Baden or Karlsbad. In their Maybachs and Horchs they travelled to their villas by routes that avoided the slums. Or, encountering the unemployed with banners saying, "We Want Bread", they bade the chauffeur draw the curtains. Those so unlucky as to be Jewish have later paid fearful penalties. But then—the SA was buying their goods—shirts and suits for thousands of young men to secure them against Bolshevism. So the word handed down through cordons of secretaries to the delegates from the Republican Youth Associations, asking only for money to buy arms against the Brownshirts, was the simple dissyllable:

"*Heraus!*"



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## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

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OUR RUSSIAN contingent was viewed by Flottow and others with so much scepticism that I like to claim I was only a stepchild of Hitlerism, or, more properly, Strasserism, for my connection with the movement through the Russian Auxiliary lasted only four months. By 1928, the struggle against opposition groups in Berlin was taxing all the Nazi resources, and the Russian Auxiliary, in spite of the fact that its constitution forbade it, was arbitrarily grafted on to the *Schöneberg Sturm*. At first we reported to the *Lokal*, which was at the corner of Hauptstrasse and Akazienstrasse, only once a week; but later beds were set up and some of my Russian "colleagues" slept there. Disliking this close connection with the *Sturm*, I refused to take up quarters with them.

One evening Volkov, who had by now officially joined the Nazi party, gave me a wink and told me I was going to be given my first assignment. It was the rather unimportant and routine task of going with a few Brownshirts to a nearby corner and beating up a crippled newsvendor who sold the liberal German paper, *Arbeiter Illustrierte*. I was utterly astonished. If the Nazi party was a working-class party, why were they attacking a poor newsvendor for selling a working-class paper? It didn't make sense.

Volkov seemed amused and contemptuous at my naïveté. He excused me from the assignment. But from then on I was less frequently seen at *Sturm* headquarters. I began to realize what I had got into.

In early Spring of that same year I paid my last visit to the *Sturm*, tossed my cap and belt down on the table and severed my tie with the Russian Auxiliary. Volkov was furious.

SA men Weber and Dickhoff, who were playing cards, threw me dirty looks. The section was getting ready for a raid on the nearby party local of the *Rotfront Kämpferbund* and all were in a fever. Ten members of the *Sturm*, all from working-class families, left the same month I broke with the Auxiliary.



We were called traitors to the new Germany. We retorted that our accusers had betrayed the German revolution.

I cast a last glance back at the *Sturm Lokal* and walked down the long dim corridor leading from the big squad room into the back room of a beer parlour. As usual, the owner was sitting behind a half-litre of beer, while his wife was washing the glasses. All around were pictures of Hess, Captain Goering and Frick. Copies of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the *Angriff* were displayed on the tables. A big sign read, "When you come in say, 'Heil Hitler'! 'Heil Hitler' is the German greeting". Pech, half drunk, was babbling something about Louis XVI—that he had been beheaded by Masons, on orders from the Jews. Two young SA's were listening open-mouthed and with their ears sticking out. Pech knew everything, even French history.

"Yes," he went on in a confidential stage whisper, "Masons, Bolshevik materialists, Jew janissaries!" His cap was askew and he was half falling off his chair.

My disgust swelled. How could I have hung around so long listening to such idiocies, enduring the barracks life, and associating with this clique of perverts? Every day a new hero to be swallowed: Goebbels, the club-footed orator, the loud-mouthed Goering, creatures such as Brückner, Schreck, and Schaub. Dirt, treason, assassination! If such was their revolutionary mission, I spat upon it.

At the start there had been other attractions besides a few marks and a uniform; there had been socialistic proposals from the Strasserites to better the conditions of workers: for the abolition of military service, a new constitution, equality between nations; in short, a confederation of the nations of Europe. They demanded that industries be nationalized and the big landed estates broken up, that Europe should disarm and tariff barriers be abolished. They spoke of some kind of Pan-European system, throughout which free trade and free interchange should prevail. Racial purity and Rosenberg were not taken too seriously. But now this programme made its adherents "Marxists" and traitors.

"Socialists are not welcome in the National-Socialist Party" was the veiled hint in the *Arbeitszeitung*, official organ of the Strasser movement. "Let the Nationalists remain!"

We were glad to get out as the rift between Otto Strasser and Goebbels became wider. For some time we continued to assemble at beer places in Steglitz and Lichterfelde, distributed handbills and held secret meetings. Our dissident



group started to organize the "penetration from within" groups which later culminated in the "Black-Front Ring" and the "German Revolution". We often served as bodyguard to one of the Strasser leaders when he made addresses and guarded Otto Strasser's personal offices on Nürnbergerstrasse. For three years, from 1927 to 1930, the vendetta between Goebbels' Storm Troops and the Strasserites was pursued with tremendous bitterness.

When we went outside the city, I had to drive a big car. One night we headed for a Communist Party assembly at Merseburg, where some of us had been invited to hear Willy Münzenberg, Communist Reichstag deputy. We had hardly left Berlin when it became apparent that we were being followed. The headlights of a car full of Goebbels' Storm Troopers drew closer and closer. Suddenly I heard the bark of guns and the whistling sound of bullets overhead. A few thudded into the roof of our car. Some of our party began to return the fire, while I stepped on the gas. It was like an American Western. Thanks to a powerful motor, we got away.

Our dissident faction in Schöneberg dwindled down to only a few men, who finally joined forces with the Communist *Rotfront Kämpferbund* against the Brownshirts. Being strong and tough, I was set the hardest tasks. By then I spoke German like a native, with a strong Berlin accent. But what I needed more than any political creed, for the moment, was the means of livelihood. My command of several languages and familiarity with Berlin qualified me to drive a taxi, and at last I found such a job. But as an alien I had no assurance of continuing in this occupation. My papers were examined almost every month. And before my grey permit card was renewed I was forced to listen again and again to the lamentations of the functionary at the window, the gist of which was that dirty foreigners were getting all the jobs. Would they never chuck us out and leave Germany to the Germans?

A fine state of affairs when a government clerk envied such earnings as mine! We taxi-drivers could afford to smoke only one-pfennig cigarettes, the famous Junos, with an occasional long beer and a schnaps to reinforce them. Meat balls were our breakfast and stood us in place of a dinner. About 6 a.m. we delivered our taxis to the garage and listened to the owner's grumbling about how bad business was. I rated among the smartest and most aggressive drivers. English, American, and French fares were surprised into giving large tips when they found that I knew their languages.



Yet Germans, even Germans who had deserved well of their country, were glad to drive taxis. There was Heinrich Ercklentz, for example. He had entered the world war at the age of eighteen. From the gymnasium bench he went straight to Verdun. He had been wounded and cited for the Iron Cross. Transferred to aviation and "Richthofen's Circus", he went through countless engagements, was wounded again, and was awarded the Iron Cross, first class, and the *Pour Le Mérite*. After the armistice he had chucked all these decorations in a drawer in his furnished room. His pride in them was destroyed by his blinding sense of betrayal when he learned of Kaiser Wilhelm's flight to Holland.

Now he sat with the rest of us in his green-and-white chequered old Mercedes drawn up just in front of me near a resort called the "Kakadu"; like me, he was working nights. Heinrich gnashed his teeth inwardly as, with outward respect, he held open the door of his cab for "fat Galician Jews" and drunken foreign tourists who were apt to make trouble about the fare. A fanatical Nazi, Heinrich was a member of the Friedenau SA and read the *Völkischer Beobachter* while waiting for customers.

Another member of our cab stand was Franz Ritter, Ph.D. He was reserved, spoke with an academic inflection and the courteous manners of the well-bred. He read the editions of the Scherl Press. Ritter was a Nationalist and belonged to the *Stahlhelm*. Henke, the big red-haired and ever-smiling driver of the convertible Wanderer, read the *Rote Fahne*. He was a Communist.

Another of my taxi-driving colleagues, Victor Broinitzky, scorned politics. He called all the prostitutes in the quarter by their pet names and made a pretty penny out of them as a side line. His visiting card read "Count Broinitzky" and he wore smart new clothes.

During our waits between customers we all read newspapers. There was nothing to unite us except our hatred of the "Schupos", the green-uniformed police, who made our lives so hard. Besides the routine difficulties, there was always the dread of some "incident". Once a woman stopped me around midnight on Budapesterstrasse and asked me in a weak voice to take her to Dahlem. She died en route. She was young, pretty, and well-dressed. A dose of veronal was found on her. I had to spend the whole following day at the police station, answering endless questions—place of birth, name of father, of mother, nationality, religion, etc.

Then there were the perpetual street disturbances. Bloody



battles were always breaking out at Neukölln and Wedding and round the offices of the *Rote Fahne*. Horst Wessel and his gangsters, bearing firearms as well as clubs, were terrorizing the slums. And one was constantly running into the motorized police patrols scouring the streets with great searchlights and "clear-the-way" signals.

Then, the speeches! All the Rosenbergs, Goerings, Strassers, Thälmanns, Neumanns and Münzenbergs were organizing youth into battle array. At our cab stand we quarrelled with increasing frequency. Everywhere the Right appeared dominant; youth cast itself into the arms of Nationalist organizations, such as the Wehrwolf and the Young German Order. Hitler had sold the N.S.D.A.P. to the capitalists and had made alliances with the Hohenzollerns, the princes, the landed proprietors, heavy industry, and the Hugenberg Press. Already he was talking of war and dominion. In those days I came closer and closer to Fritz Henke and his *Rote Fahne*.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

GERDA WAS PRETTY. She wore a red plaid dress and a grey satin scarf. She smoked constantly. Her cigarette holder was always in her smoke-discoloured fingers. She had reddish-brown hair which covered her forehead, wide-set blue eyes and a little tip-tilted nose. Her features were finely cut. She had natural elegance and was always simple with none of the affectations that are often found in working-class girls or those with small office jobs.

I met her at the Lunte, an odd establishment whose owner, a short, fat, swarthy woman, smoked big cigars. It was situated in Rankestrasse. You could eat or drink there at any hour of the day or night. It was patronized by extreme Leftists. Red Front manifestos were strewn around the wooden benches. A raised fist was the greeting on entering. There were always half a dozen huskies guarding the door against sudden SA



attacks. A Nazi headquarters was only a couple of streets away.

I often went there to play chess. The best players came there from the Romanische Café on Tauentzienstrasse. I talked a little with Gerda and we went out together. There were a few marks in my pocket. I stopped my taxi meter and we went to a little Halensee restaurant. It was a lovely summer evening. Kurfürstendamm was illuminated; yellow and green lanterns hung from the balconies. The atmosphere was one of peace, order and happiness. Gerda was wearing a leather jacket like mine. She belonged to the *Rote Fahne* propaganda service and was active in the Schöneberg propaganda district. Her dream was to go to Russia. She had Lenin's picture in a locket; in the other side was a little pressed daisy. She wore heelless shoes. I thought her adorable.

Life revived for me that summer night. My lungs filled. Gerda fancied my broad shoulders and revelled in my tales of Russia. I adored her face, her manners, her naïve smile and the seriousness with which she expounded to me the Party line. She divided her life between the fourth floor of the *Rote Fahne*, where she worked and where I often called for her, and incessant political discussion. Sometimes she would try to convert a circle of Brownshirts, bringing to bear all her youthful magnetism and the freshness of her musical voice. Behind her big typewriter hung pictures of Thälmann and Radek. She often worked all night. I waited at the exit, my hands on the wheel of my taxi, to be ready for any emergency. Twice I was picked up by the police and questioned about what brought me there every morning. They could not credit any motive so simple or harmless as love.

On fine nights we strolled through the avenues pressed close together. Gerda recited speeches of Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Bukharin. Such knowledge surprised me in a little girl with upturned lips and smiling eyes. We passed the new impressionist houses with marble fronts. Imitation suns, advertising Sarotti chocolates, shed on the pavements an odd lunar light. Motor horns tooted impatiently—a traffic jam caused by a parade of Brownshirts coming from a political assembly where Dr. Goebbels had been speaking. Gerda clenched her small hands and hung tight to me, shivering. At such moments I felt superhumanly strong, as though with her help I could set everything right. The others in the street showed scant respect for the marchers. A few saluted. Most muttered, "*Lumpen!*" and shook their heads. An old man



smiled broadly. Two students sounded off with the Horst Wessel song as the last marchers disappeared. I turned up my collar, feeling suddenly chilly.

We were in the midst of Goebbels' "Battle for Berlin". Should I stay and continue to involve myself in such events? This was, after all, not my own country. I wanted to go somewhere a long way off, preferably to a desert island where there would be exotic palms, sand and music. However, Gerda was wedded to the fourth floor of the Karl Liebknecht House in Bülowplatz . . .

About five o'clock one hot afternoon I was waiting for Gerda in front of a cinema in Hauptstrasse, where they were showing the Soviet film *Battle Cruiser Potemkin*. The audience had begun to emerge—little skirmishers in red berets. They were workers' children, whom Gerda was leading and organizing. They lined up outside the theatre and set out, singing the "Internationale". My eyes dwelt on Gerda's charming figure: I was picturing her in a well-tailored evening frock. Then all at once I heard a familiar tramp of feet and "*Die Fahne hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen*"—Wessel's song!

I picked up the crank of my Adler. Two comrades were parked behind me, members of the German Social Democratic Front organization. They were war veterans, men over forty. They took their cranks in hand.

The Brownshirts had stopped before the theatre. Under the advertising poster showing the *Potemkin's* batteries, they fell into formation. A command was barked.

"Up and at 'em—*Kommunistische Schweine!*"

Methodically, the Nazis began clubbing the children. Gerda was in the midst of it. An insane joy surged in me as I began laying about with my crank. Every time I hit one of them it was like absolution for my past associations. There were fully half a dozen swastikaed caps between Gerda and me. My mates were at my back, hitting hard and saving their breath. You could hear the skulls cracking. Other taxi-drivers joined us, and a few labourers, returning from work with parcels under their arms, sprang into the *melee*. I battered my way to the Nazi leader and raised my crank. I have a vivid recollection of the grape leaves he had embroidered on his collar. He drew a knife. I swung my weapon down with a will. Two or three fearful wallops, and he sprawled on the ground with a cracked head.

I grabbed Gerda by the hand and ran for the taxi. We could hear the police-truck sirens coming down Akazien-



strasse. For one horrible moment I thought the engine wouldn't start. Poor Gerda, she was so pale!

Only when we were passing Bayrischerplatz did I feel a burning sensation in my wrist and realize that I was wounded. Luckily the Nazi leader's knife had not reached the bone. Gerda ran to fetch a Russian doctor friend to my place. I was a little feverish and Gerda sat by me all night. All I could think of was that with my right eye swollen I must look utterly disgusting. All the same, Gerda was near me. I held her hand and was happy, kissing the little smoke-yellowed fingers while the air in the room turned blue from her cigarettes.

How lucky I had been near the cinema!

The hunger march was on. There were thousands with hollow cheeks, seamed faces, drooping heads. They bore banners: "*Work*," "*Bread*," "*We Will Not Starve*." The lettering was blood-red on white cloth. Men in workers' caps carried the scrolls, good industrious folk. All they asked was a few marks a day, a little margarine, a few slices of liverwurst for modest sandwiches, some potatoes for their suppers. Four long years these men had fought while their wives and daughters made hand grenades. From the Rhine to the Danube and from the Danube to the Oder they had endured every hardship. Now a hundred thousand of them, for the procession was endless, were marching in defiance of joblessness and starvation. They were turned aside at the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtnis Kirche into Budapesterstrasse. Cordons of police armed with clubs stood ready to strike.

The demonstrators marched on under the muzzles of machine guns.

The patrolmen in their green uniforms sat motionless in their trucks; an officer in his white gloves watched with simulated boredom. Big Maybach and Mercedes cars whirled past, flinging mud in the marchers' faces. It was Christmas Eve. The windows on the Kurfürstendamm were bright. The church clocks were chiming.

"*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!*"

The carol persisted long after the sound of marching feet had faded away.

Toward midnight, the streets began to be deserted. The Kakadu was empty. In the windows of prosperous houses there were lighted Christmas trees. But from our cab stand things looked just the same. A fine snow was falling. The streets were getting white.



We cabbies celebrated our Christmas in a *Kutscher Kneipe*: a cold hamburger with mustard, a brandy, a long beer. Someone played "O Tannenbaum". A few whores waddled in. I was to meet Gerda later. She was still detained at Bülowplatz. An exuberant blonde and a couple of men in fur coats, white gloves and top hats got into my cab. They gave me a Zehlendorf address. When I asked some questions about it, one of the men got wild.

"Don't you know Berlin? A foreigner?"

"I'm Russian," I replied.

"Oh, I see. Come on, everybody—let's take the next cab. These Russians can't drive. How do they ever get permits?"

I kept my mouth shut, as my permit had long since expired. The licensing office declined to renew it and I was driving at the risk of thirty days if a cop got his hands on me.

The next fare was a landowner from the provinces with a thick neck, a little green hat with a feather, and thin legs in brownish gaiters. He was looking for fun in Friedrichstrasse. "Little girls, nice little girls," he whined in a thin voice. I started my motor, counting the hours till I should see Gerda. Her image never left me and was the one joy of these joyless days. My passenger was scolding about something—"Damned Berlin swinishness—wretched republic—Jew republic." Someone had picked his pocket. "They bring French and nigger women here to the night clubs. Damnation!" I dropped him in Friedrichstrasse and drove west again with a couple of carefree Englishmen. Now the streets were frosted with snow. The city was festal white. Chimes rang in the distance. Solitary devotees scuffed by, returning from midnight mass. It had been a queer evening.

I turned off my meter, stepped on the accelerator, hurried to our rendezvous and picked up Gerda. The lights and the Christmas trees, we saw, were more modest in Berlin's Northeast. All that "holy and silent" night Gerda and I talked of plans for the future. I had a desperate desire to go somewhere. Gerda wanted me to join the Communist Party. She said it needed people like me. The fight was intensifying. The situation of the proletariat was becoming worse. The profiteers were getting richer and more obnoxious. The SA must be met and squashed on their own battleground, weapon in hand, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

With her eyes dilated, her face flushed with enthusiasm, she was ravishing. On a chair lay the new shawl I had given her.



She had seemed so happy to find me waiting for her with the parcel at our little eating place. . . .

She waved aside all my objections, my former flirtation with the Nazis, my privileged birth, my family status as a class enemy. My stories of the revolutionary years in Russia and of my friends of the steppes had made a deep impression on Gerda. She had already spoken about me. She was daily expecting the return from Moscow of an important comrade.

Comrade Bauer was fond of Gerda. He had even taken her out. They had spent an evening at the Vaterland Cafe, and he had held her hand and talked about their future together. Gerda meant to tell him everything—that she loved me and that I could do a lot—be a courier for the Comintern, or maybe hold a job in the *Rote Fahne's* foreign department.

The sun rose and we were still arguing, I tried to talk Gerda over. I couldn't convince myself that the revolution would triumph in Germany. If we could get away—to Brazil or Peru—and there start a new life! I was fed up with the gang wars in Berlin's suburbs, with the killers and pimps, the long beers, the dives, and the one-pfennig Junos that we smoked all night long.

I spoke of the lack of organization in the *Rotfront Kämpferbund*, the lack of money and proper weapons, the lack of military training and discipline. The Nazi system worked like clockwork. They always had money for weapons. Lately they'd all been issued brass knuckle-dusters and rubber truncheons. In some incomprehensible way they were getting army revolvers. Machine guns were in their Sunday drills. We'd been taught to attack in waves. There was special instruction in the technique of street fighting and the use of hand grenades. The *Sturms* were actual fortresses with secret entrances and exits. The motorcar and motorcycle squads could dash from one section to another and bring up reinforcements in the briefest time. In short, it was nothing less than an army. If such training went on, the SA would inevitably crush the Communist and Social Democratic fighting units, and become an important adjunct to the Reichswehr.

Gerda listened to me with attention. Much that I said was new to her, for she was a theoretician. Moreover, the strength of the Nazis was less apparent in Berlin than in the provinces. I was well informed of what was going on in the SA outside Berlin, since many of my old Schwarzburg friends were active in the party. Sepp Richter had become a Halle group leader. Once a nice, blond-haired third-form boy, he and I had fished



for trout with our hands in the Schwarza River. Fritz Zelle was working in Erfurt. Pimple-faced Ernst, whom I had known at Stark's *Privat Schule*, and who, as messenger boy for a textile firm in the Spittelmarkt, had been fired for stealing stamps, had now become a big shot in Munich, in Captain Röhm's innermost council, Obergruppenführer of the SS, Adolf's body-guards.

Hitler's and his disciples' Mercedes convertibles went speeding over the country roads day and night. They visited the remotest villages, promising everything to everybody: to the Nationalist, nationalism; to the Socialists, German socialism . . .

It was fantastic, but these Nazi youths had staying power, had money behind them and organization. The wheels were greased for them. They had behind them the solidarity of the big German bourgeoisie. Dr. Schäfer had written me a long letter with Hellenic embellishments, hoping that, now I was man-grown, I understood the movement and what it meant for Germany. Dr. Dubs wrote a couple of lines—an invitation to me, as a former student, to the autumn festival and Party assembly at Schwarzburg—concluding with a "Heil Hitler!" The school was now overtly a stronghold of reaction in the Thuringian forests. The spiderweb thickened and toughened.

Gerda listened with wide blue eyes, dark-ringed by the lateness of the hour. Then with a sad smile she glanced at the cigarette butts overrunning the coffee cups. We couldn't decide this matter to-night. . . .

Christmas morning came, bright and festive. I awoke to hear my landlady outside the door, saying that she was leaving a piece of the traditional *Napfkuchen*. Snow had frosted the sash of the window at our bedside and the crystals shone in the sun. I blew at them sleepily and they flew in all directions. Gerda was still dozing on my arm, a deep line scoring her lovely forehead. She looked like a child who had fallen asleep overtaxed with lessons. I could not sleep, but lay quietly watching the play of the sunbeams in the frost pictures on the pane, as they crept toward Gerda's hair.

Soon after, in the first days of January, 1929, I took Gerda's advice and went to Bülowplatz. Two sturdy guards in leather jackets demanded my pass. I gave them Gerda's name. She dashed out, her eyes shining with joy. We went up to the third floor together and she pushed open a door.

Behind a table piled high with books sat a baldheaded man. Portraits of Dzerjinsky and Clara Zetkin hung on the wall behind him. It was Bauer, Gerda's friend—the same chap, I



recalled, who had taken her out to dinner. I eyed him suspiciously. His clothes were new and fresh, while mine were shabby. His lips were too full, he was beginning to get plump, and he must be well into middle age. Somehow I disliked the fellow. What could Gerda have seen in him? Even now—I persuaded myself, squinting at him—he was looking at Gerda in a way I didn't like.

"Good morning," he said. "I've been told about your part in the incident at the cinema on Hauptstrasse, and Gerda tells me you want to join the Party." He smiled and offered me a chair. "It's not an easy life. What makes you want to come along with us?"

One ought to be able to sink personal antagonisms in the service of a cause, I told myself. Burying my dislike for Bauer, I devoted a full hour to describing my life from birth to the present circumstances. I spoke of my belief in the revolution and devotion to the oppressed masses, my love for Russia and wish to return there. Finally I began to apologize for my activity with the Russian Auxiliary.

Bauer listened attentively, taking particular note of the last portion of my recital. When I had finished he smiled suddenly. "Don't worry so much about your ancestry or the way you've earned your living! We don't take such things too seriously. Your coming to us is evidence that you're overcoming those handicaps. But frankly, your affiliation with the Russian Auxiliary puts a new complexion on the matter. Many former Fascists are trying to join us and there is no doubt that some of them are spies. I am not challenging your sincerity, of course, but I'm sure you realize why we must be careful in times like these."

I could see Bauer's point, and yet his insinuation made me flush angrily.

"Because of your connection with the White Russians, however," Bauer continued, "you possess a great deal of invaluable information. You could give us details about the various Russian organizations you've been mixed up with—tell us their personnel, their plans. . . ."

"I'm afraid you're making a mistake, Herr Bauer," I interrupted hotly. "I don't want to inform against anyone—especially fellow Russians. I want to work and fight."

Bauer looked up sharply from the slip of white paper on which he had methodically been taking notes. There was some warmth in his own tone. "You wouldn't care to inform—against the Fascists?"



I caught a glimpse of Gerda's face, white, drawn, devoid of expression.

"Damn it," I exploded, "I don't care who they are! I'm not a stool-pigeon."

Bauer shrugged his shoulders and sighed. Then at length he said, "This is not a question of stool-pigeons, of moral absolutes. This is a question of devotion to the interests of working-class democracy. In time you will understand this. Meanwhile, before you can become a Party member, you will have to demonstrate your sincerity. Become active in some working-class or mass organization. Work there devotedly for a year or so. Then, when you have proved yourself, we can bring up your application again."

A year or so! What did Bauer expect me to do during that time, I asked myself—go off somewhere and continue starving? What did he mean by babbling on like this?

Some of my feeling must have showed in my face. Gerda looked at me sternly. Her face wore a new expression. I was seeing her now as a Party member under discipline. She gave me not one glance of encouragement.

Bauer continued, "I know you are disappointed at this delay, but I want to stress that membership in our Party is not something to be carelessly entered into. It is dangerous, especially in Germany to-day, and it requires discipline, self-sacrifice, bravery, and devotion to the working-class."

I nodded, unable to say a word.

"Meanwhile, I'd like to help you as much as I can," Bauer said. "If you drop in next week, I'll be able to suggest some mass organization where you can work. Good luck!"

The minute we were outside, Gerda pressed my hand warmly. "It'll be all right," she said. "Eight o'clock this evening at your place."

I made all speed away from the Karl Liebknecht house with an odd sensation that I was being watched and spied upon. What did Bauer mean by "dangerous?" I had taken plenty of risks and would take plenty more—but not just to show "good faith". I wasn't a performing dog that would jump through hoops for Comrade Bauer's amusement. Would Hitler sit still for a year while Bauer explored everyone's "sincerity"? For that matter, what proof did I have of Bauer's good faith? The way he had looked at Gerda . . .

Actually I was bitterly disappointed by the interview. I had a Russian friend working for the "Derutra", the Russo-German trading corporation, for a regular monthly salary, and



had hoped the Party would find me such a job. Then I could marry Gerda and live at last like other folks, unenviable though their living standards might be. I even had visions of a motorcycle for trips into the country, and a cottage with a tiny red flag flying over it, where Gerda and I would sit, as other workers did, of a Sunday. All of which may be taken to show that, though sympathetic to the Communist movement, I was not ready to take my place in the disciplined ranks of the CP.

I loved Gerda heart and soul, but I could not meet this test. The long and short of it was that thenceforth our ways parted.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

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A CHANGE OF SCENE and affiliations seemed desirable. I moved from the tragic environs of Wedding and Neukölln to lodgings in Westen's Knesebeckstrasse, which was lined on either side with neat shops. Flickering letters advertised the Juschni show *Blue Bird*.

My room was in a modiste's apartment. She was an odd woman, a Rumanian with black hair parted in the middle, a dark complexion, big earrings, and hard, intelligent eyes. A girl was living with her, to whom she referred as "My niece". The niece was scarcely twenty and had immense, infinitely kind black eyes. Her father, a naval officer killed in the war, had had her brought up in a Catholic convent, where for nine years she was cuffed by the nuns and made miserable. You could read in her eyes the memory of that daily unmitigated wretchedness. Her hair was long, black and singularly alive. She was fond of going barefoot in the apartment. She was as uncontaminated as a child by the ugliness with which her "aunt" surrounded her. The latter, formerly a chorine, dressed the girl like a doll. Men of ripe years frequented the place and took Nana out. The name accorded well with the tragic cast



of her face as she told me of her unhappy childhood, with its endless masses and penances, and the nuns who had slapped her face with wet rags. At night the girls' hands had been tied to their coverlets.

When Nana came to the subject of her "aunt", her eyes overflowed. I gazed into their black depths. Her fine white hands touched me. It was nightfall and we were alone. I knelt before her and buried my face in her cold, pale-fingered hands. The clock ticked loudly. Something inexpressible was occurring in me, something painful and tumultuous. We remained thus some time without speaking.

I sensed Nana's aura of tragedy and the strangeness of everything about her, and I had an impulse to escape. But instead, incoherently, I blurted out a profession of love. She pressed my hands hard and yielded, her eyes still wide and haunted. She spoke hesitantly in abrupt phrases and gazed at me as though she wanted to read my thoughts. When I brought her a small bunch of violets, she cried.

My difficulty with Gerda had been my failure to satisfy her host of in-laws or, in other words, her *Rote Fahne* brethren. Accordingly, Nana's orphaned condition and her being so aloof even from her fictitious aunt was a special attraction. Indeed, having suffered an overdose of contemporary reality, I valued in Nana her air of being an anachronism. She was like some virgin in an ancient tapestry who had been discovered, one chill spring morning, astray in a Northern forest. It was as though, by discovering the secret of a new dimension, I had been able to step backwards out of the normal time sequence.

Those huge eyes of hers, with their long lashes, could be provocative, curious, melancholy, or tender. Her irregular, rather brusque features, her half-open lips and gleaming teeth, reminded me of one of Murillo's early Madonnas. We had infinitely happy hours together, and when occasionally the shadow of a premonition fell on us, it had only the effect of making us clutch each other more closely.

"Don't leave me. Smile at me again," Nana would plead. And I would beg her not to be so melancholy or fearful. . . .

In a sense, it was difficult to take her plight seriously. The aunt was clearly engaged in disposing of the girl matrimonially to the highest bidder. It was like the fiction of an obsolete social epoch, say Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*. Modern melodrama was so much more raw and violent; even such a sensational work as the currently popular *Ouvert la Nuit* of Paul Morand was understated.



Yet the aunt, while she seemed a relic of nineteenth-century realism, proved effective enough. Her vigilant eye was always upon us. I drew hostile glances from her and from the actors and music-hall people who came to see her. Soon I had to decamp and Nana and I were meeting in the parks, at street corners or small refreshment places. I still had no work, and we were both immensely unhappy.

As I rambled through the Berlin streets, Nana's childlike eyes followed me, eyes that seemed to ignore the ugliness of life around her, the grotesque theatre folk, with the habit of meaningless grimacing. Her aunt brought them in from the café opposite the Wintergarten on Friedrichstrasse. Rouged chorines and actors with lush voices stared at Nana open-mouthed with admiration and offered well-meant advice how best she could be converted to cash. It wasn't long before these friends from the Wintergarten had found the right man for Nana. A grain merchant, he was soon to carry Nana off to his Hanseatic mansion in Bremen. The prospect, though dreary enough, had a certain outmoded grimness, more like poetry than life. Nana hated him. The old man was offering her aunt a considerable sum. He addressed Nana as "my child" and his toothless mouth watered as he looked at her. We put up a battle, but we were both so poor. Everything hinged on my finding work. And there wasn't any. The grain merchant won the battle. He and his fiancée left for Bremen.

The job that I found at last, aside from coming too slowly, was something in a far different atmosphere from Nana's. It jerked me back to the thoroughly prosaic present.

I was taken on as handy man for board, room and twenty marks a month at a boarding house in the fashionable West Berlin section. The patrons, businessmen from Warsaw, traders from Riga, Belgian tourists and a few Englishmen, augmented my earnings with tips. The owner, a big Russian woman, was married to a little chap with bow legs and the air of a fox terrier. I shared a room with two porters. When a number four flashed on the signal board, or when there were four rings, I answered the call.

I did everything—pressed suits, typed letters, translated several languages, and read aloud. Or if one of the boarders made some helpless gestures, hemmed and hawed and muttered something about women: "You know I'm a stranger here—"

"Oh, a girl! All right," I would say, "I'll fix you up."

Yes, I was a man-of-all-work. I had my living to make and I had resolved to set aside a few marks to go to South America.



My pal of the taxi epoch, Victor Broinitzky, often would come to see me. We would spend hours thinking up fantastic schemes to make easy money.

Meanwhile, I found I was summoned with special frequency by the occupant of Room 11. Captain Joseph Amerzinski required services several times a day. I generally found him recumbent, his eyes half-closed. His face was ugly, his forehead deeply lined, his eyes piercing and red-lidded, his nose predatory. He seemed to have boundless leisure. Herbert Timm, the little blond porter who worked with me, shared my curiosity and kept studying Captain Amerzinski over his spectacles as he murmured the customary, "Guten Morgen" or "Guten Abend, Herr Kapitän!"

Joseph Amerzinski was open-handed and had given the chambermaid ten marks just to sit on the edge of his bed while he lay and smoked interminable cigarettes. The floor was littered with butts. He had been a Russian officer in a Caucasian cavalry division and had fought under Pilsudski in the 1920 campaign against the Bolsheviks, thus achieving his rank of captain. His estate at Thorn on the German-Polish frontier was said to be large and prosperous; at any rate, he paid liberally for my small services, took me to plays and movies, and introduced me to some fashionable women who spoke excellent German and Polish—one of whom he addressed as "Baroness".

Captain Amerzinski fell back on his couch exhausted by his flow of words. I was faced with a difficult choice. It was like a dream—or a movie. He had made no clear mention of espionage, which was a capital crime. Since I had failed to find a place in contemporary German life, I felt no overwhelming loyalty to Germany. On the other hand, I had my reasons for entertaining a positive aversion to Poland. But I had, as yet, developed no fixed principles or social philosophy. Why not play along with Amerzinski for the three hundred marks a month? If I was ever to give effect to my plan of getting to South America, I would have to save more than was possible from my tips and my twenty marks a month.

The weeks following are deeply graven in memory: the hotel on Victoria-Luisen-Platz, the smart women escorted by young Reichswehr officers, the tea dances at fashionable hotels. Money jingled in my pockets. Amerzinski introduced me to his friends. Life became a round of hotel lobbies, visits to a mysterious villa near the Tiergarten, and trips to the Polish



border, where Amerzinski would cross over to his Thorn estate. At the villa an elegant young man would hand me an envelope and I would rush back to the hotel driving an expensive American Packard. Imperious orders came: "Wait for me at eleven-thirty at the Schlesischer Bahnhof with a valise which the Baroness B—— will give you."

Though life was much pleasanter, I was conscious of an accretion of dangers from day to day . . .

I do not know the names of all the persons I met. They included a number of Berlin society folk, screen and stage actresses, and several young employees of the Luisenufer Reichswehr Ministry. I plied between the boarding house on Victoria-Luisen-Platz and the Tiergarten villa, carrying unintelligible code messages on blue, grey or red sheets of paper. The Baroness, surrounded by attractive girls, was always gracious. At her place I met Colonel P—— and the Countess Brigitta Z——, very eccentric and very lovely. She was something out of Morand and interested me more than Amerzinski's multi-coloured messages and all his friends put together. I was through with being an idealist and I felt the relationship had this merit: it earmarked me as having abandoned the *recherche du temps perdu*.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

ONE DAY DURING a tea dance at the Eden Hotel, the Baroness took me to one side. "Young man," she said, "I'm going to introduce you to one of the most fascinating women in Poland. She's a young divorcee, one of our landed nobility. But she simply can't sit still on the estate! She studied in France—"

The Countess Brigitta Z—— was approaching with someone. At once I recognized the slender shape, the blonde hair, the ardent grey eyes. This elegant figure in the dark tailored suit, "the most charming divorcee in Poland," was—Wanda!

She came slowly forward. I stood still, feeling awkward,



afraid I should blush and stammer as I had done when we first met in the Louvre so long ago, like a silly schoolboy.

"Victor! You here!"

"Wanda!"

I clutched her wrists in my hands and stood there I don't know how long, staring into her eyes. All the unhappiness of the past faded away while our eyes searched each other. I could tell that Wanda, too, was resurrecting the hours we had spent together. The little restaurant on Quai Saint-Michel, the country tavern in Calvados, came to life again.

From that moment all other considerations disappeared and I had only one thought: to be near her.

Wanda broke the silence with a laugh. "You're quieter, Victor! What's become of all that Russian temperament? I like you better this way."

"You've grown up too, Wanda," I said. "You're very beautiful."

It was true, as I discovered in the coming weeks: Wanda had matured, had changed. She had found her own place in the whirlpool of Berlin society, lived a full life surrounded by admirers and friends, was obviously well off and had acquired that certain cynicism which goes with being an accomplished beauty. I could not imagine her now running along the sand dunes, the wind rippling through her hair, exclaiming, "Oh, life is wonderful!" while we looked forward together to a future full of mystery and delight. No, all this had changed. But it didn't matter. Wanda was with me. The days flew by in a frenzied enchantment.

I was infatuated with Wanda and thought of nothing else but the luck that had made this new life with her possible. Our nights passed in wild embraces. My wardrobe expanded, and life was careless and elegant. Driving Amerzinski's car past the cab rank and the *Sturm* headquarters where my former mates were drinking their beers and smoking their Junos, I revelled in the excitement and mystery of my new role.

People who before had crossed the street to avoid me now stopped to ask me questions. I explained that I was private secretary to a rich landholder of Thorn. My friend Victor Broinitzky, the "count" as he called himself, plainly envied me my existence, and begged to meet my new friends and employer.

Victor was tall and slim and had aristocratic features. After finishing his stint of taxi-driving, he liked to go to the American bars, smoke expensive cigarettes, sport a monocle, and dance



with women who often asked him to supper. His mother, who scrubbed floors at a Russian restaurant to earn the rent for their tiny apartment on Uhlandstrasse, was always imploring me to talk to him seriously, as she was in constant dread of his going to the bad.

My character and convictions were still too ill-formed to alienate me from Broinitzky, and one day I introduced him to Captain Amerzinski. They took to one another instantly. Broinitzky's father had been a White army colonel and the Bolsheviki had put him to death. He hated the Soviet Union as fanatically as the captain, while both, being blindly reactionary, despised the German Second Reich.

Meanwhile I continued frequenting the tea dances at the Eden and the Adlon with the Countess Brigitta and Wanda, whose pale face and warm grey eyes attracted everyone's attention. I kissed her hands ecstatically in public; she called me a young lunatic. Her eyes shone with self-confidence, her nose tilted disdainfully; but her hair was still cut in the same fashion she had worn in Paris, and fell softly around her head when she tossed it back in the old, familiar gesture. I quivered at the sorcery of her voice, talked nonsense to her, told her glamorous lies, never mentioning the misery I had gone through when we parted, and sent her flowers every day.

Amerzinski left us much together: lately he had been smoking very heavily and taking morphine injections. Then one day he recalled me to reality and told me why I had been singled out to work in his organization. It was something concerning the Spandau armoury, documents about the defences of Tilsit and Eydtkuhnen, near which were some emplacements of new heavy artillery.

That night I was to go to Spandau-Hackenfelde, where a man would hand me a valise. I was to transmit it to a certain Mr. Koletzky, whom I had met at tea at the Baroness's. . . .

Something in me revolted. Hitherto I had been merely a secretary, performing such services as anyone might who had been hired in such a capacity. But now—it was a matter of actually becoming a spy. I had no feeling for Poland, none for the Reich, and none for my present life. How could I become a spy without the excuse of any political conviction? Sentiments I had kept hidden for weeks now asserted themselves. Still, because of the words of affection from Wanda which were still so vivid to me, I could bring myself to say nothing. I dutifully awaited Captain Amerzinski's final injunctions.

"You'll be there on the dot at the station?"



"Yes. I'll try to be." He must have caught the shade of weakening in my voice.

"Shall I send someone with you as far as the garden colony behind the armoury?"

"Oh, no," I said. "Leave it all to me."

Not long after I walked furtively into Potsdamer Platz, where I was to catch the tram. Lighted signboards, "Café Vaterland—Liquors Kantorowitz—" transfused the square with a bluish, conspiratorial haze. People stared at me inquisitively, as though it were plain that I was taking the tram to Spandau. I was smoking as heavily as Amerzinski. In a few hours I would have stamped myself as one of those persons who had sold everything, risked everything, for money.

The tram bore me to the other end of Berlin. Big buildings gave place to suburban houses. I got off at the end of the line, in a crowd of young men and women carrying rucksacks and singing. Then I began walking. The streets were black. Soon I reached the peaceful garden colony with its miniature houses and well-tended garden plots.

I would have an hour to wait—and think. A woman passed. Then two men stopped under a lamp to light cigarettes. They had a military air. My heart almost stopped. I watched while the minutes seemed hours. But the men finally passed on.

No, I thought, it was madness, what I was about to do—sell my principles, my freedom of action, possibly my life to these international jackals! A sudden fear came over me, plain, simple fear.

I turned and almost ran back to the tram terminus. Luckily the car was still waiting. The conductor was wolfing a sandwich. We set off. My head was in a whirl. . . .

That same night I met Amerzinski in Room 11. We exchanged brief, pregnant words. He was strangely polite. His red-lidded eyes held an icy glance. Only the corners of his nose were quivering. With a trembling hand he extinguished one cigarette after another. All he said was, "Well, young man—I tried to do my best for you and your future. You've spoiled it. I'm sorry."

Victor Broinitzky was quick to grab my place. Now his attitude towards me was different; he seemed to distrust me. Yet one day he asked, after several drinks, "What do you think they'd give me at Luisenufer if I blew the whole works?"

I shivered, thinking of what would happen if Broinitzky ever dared go to the Reichswehr Ministry. Amerzinski's agents would act instantly. I had heard about his squad of killers,



and one night he had introduced me to two well-dressed men at the bar of Johnny's Night Club—one a former Polish gangster from Chicago with a ten-year prison record, the other a too-correctly clad Pole known simply as Mr. Ludzik.

I talked long to Victor, reminding him of his duty to his mother and sister. But one day I saw Olga, the sister, driving in a smart-looking car down the Kurfürstendamm with Amerzinski, and I knew that she, too, had been drawn into the sinister circle. She looked young and charming in her new clothes; hitherto she had known only the privations of exile. We had been good friends; I recalled her reciting Baudelaire to me.

I talked to Victor again and tried to persuade him to quit. But it was too late. Victor was already making regular trips between Berlin and Warsaw, and had been furnished with a new Polish passport which he proudly displayed. He spoke of a not-distant prospect of being commissioned in the Polish army, and treated me as a fool for throwing up my chances. The Spandau-Hackenfelde mission had proved to be simple after all; he laughed at my hesitations. Almost every week he went prowling by night through the garden colony adjacent to Spandau. Clad in a suit of imported English woollen he was hardly recognizable as the pal who had waited with me for customers before the "Kakadu" and cranked his cold taxi engine with stiff and shivering hands.

One day he proposed that I go with him to Poland, where Amerzinski would give me a job on his estate—a fine country, a quiet life. I came near accepting.

It was Olga who put me wise. They wanted to get rid of me; I knew too much of their organization, and the matter could be handled more deftly at Thorn. So I declined the offer.

Amerzinski at once blacklisted me.

This would be followed by one of two things, I knew. Either there would be some dirty work by his agents, or I would be exposed in certain German police circles which themselves often worked against the Second Reich, as a spy—one of Amerzinski's ways of eliminating persons who were no longer welcome in his ranks.

I was still in bed one morning when Amerzinski's well-dressed gunmen climbed the two flights to my elegant apartment. They sat quietly on the edge of my bed and smoked. Then Ludzik, in a few cutting words, gave Amerzinski's opinion of me: I was "yellow", a "quitter", and "capable of



anything". I would have three days to get out of the country. Otherwise—

They filed noiselessly out.

I had expected this visit, yet had been unable to give up my delirious pursuit of Wanda. I had been begging her to leave Berlin and come to Paris with me. Her attitude to this proposal had always been rather strange, and as the days had passed I found suspicion growing in me that she herself was a member of the Amerzinski circle. Now that I had been ordered to leave Germany, I put the question to her directly. We were having supper at the Barberina Club. She avoided a direct answer. But her expensive furs, jewels and dresses spoke eloquently. The "wealthy divorcee" drew her income from Fascist Poland's espionage service.

There was no choice for me but to disappear. I took sanctuary in the working-class district of Gesundbrunnen. It was a shame to leave the fashionable Westen and my charming flat, but in Wedding and Neukölln there would be plenty of friends who would help me take care of Pan Ludzik or any other Amerzinski emissary.

Now I was living in the densely populated north side of Berlin near the Schönhauserallee in a miserable room where an iron bed and an oilstove were the only furniture. As I lay there praying for sleep I could hear ghostly apparitions in the hallway disputing over a plate of cabbage or a fifth of a herring. Since I had lavishly spent my money, the rent payment had left me with only a few marks in my pocket. I had pawned my clothes.

Thinking of Wanda, I angrily flung my paper in the corner. Sleep was impossible. The words "coward" and "quitter" kept coming back to me. The smell of cabbage soup was unbearable. Every sort of odour got in through the window but never a breath of pure air. Cops were pacing up and down outside. I covered my head with my coat and tried not to hear them. Sleep was my refuge, my only escape from night and shadow. At last the footsteps on the street faded out . . .

I woke with a dull, heavy head. I spent the whole day in Alexanderplatz bars haunted by thoughts of Wanda. I had to see her again. I strode through the square and found a telephone. The Baroness answered in a strained voice from Victoria-Luisen-Platz. Then Wanda came to the phone.

She said I might meet her that evening at eleven o'clock in



an obscure, sequestered spot we knew near the Tiergarten Bahnhof. And no one—no one must know of our meeting.

She was wearing a fur coat with wide sleeves and as she came down the path to meet me she kept glancing around uneasily. There was a rustle of fabrics and furs—a heavy new perfume—and Wanda was there. She gave me her hand; and as the wide sleeve fell back, I kissed her hand, wrist and arm to the elbow. We walked together along a tree-darkened avenue.

"You know, Captain Amerzinski's very angry with you," she said. "The Baroness, too."

We turned into a dim-lit alley. The motorways were virtually deserted: naked tree limbs tossed against a black sky. Wanda spoke in brief phrases, abstracted and nervous.

Presently she clutched my hand and said convulsively, "Go away, Victor. Go away before it's too late! I implore you, for the sake of everything you loved in our past . . ."

We moved side by side into a thickening fog.

"You don't mind our walking a little?" I asked. "I need some fresh air."

"Oh, no," she said nervously. "I was going to suggest it myself."

We walked on, more rapidly now as Wanda's agitation mounted. "Let's cross here," she said. "My car is quite close."

"I'll come along with you," I said instantly.

"No, not to-night. I'm going to bed. I have a nasty headache."

She extended a strangely cold hand. The car door slammed and I felt myself quite alone in the penetrating chill of night.

What an odd, frigid, furtive rendezvous in this wintry Tiergarten! And how different from our triumphal entries into the night clubs—Wanda in a black lacquered gown, her lovely arms and back set off with the smartest jewels!

I turned up my coat collar, thrust my hands in my pockets, and headed back to the Tiergarten Station, my mind full of thoughts of Wanda and inexpressible fears. Suddenly a silhouette took shape in the dimness of a little copse. There were soft footfalls coming nearer. I half-turned. The man quickened his pace, hurried toward me. As he drew near he thrust out an arm. His hand held a gleaming object.

I dived into the shrubbery. There was a shot. The slug hummed close by my ear.

"Stand or I'll shoot!"

I was glad now of Flottow's training. I crouched, then zig-



zagged through the slim cover the ground afforded. If only I could reach the trees before my way was cut off. It was a matter of seconds—

There was a second voice and a Polish oath: "*Psia Krew!*"

Then another shot, less close.

I ran for my life.

Passengers were streaming out of the station.

"Did you hear the shot?" they were asking.

A *Schupo* was rounding up the tramps who had been spending the night on the station benches. "Your papers? Residence? Surname?"

He flashed his light in my face. "Did you hear a shot?"

"No," I said.

"Are you sure?"

"Sure."

"What are you hanging around for? Have you got a place to stay?"

"No."

"Well, that's too bad! You know it's against the law to sleep on station benches! Come along to headquarters."

I was never happier to spend a night in jail.

In the tank cell I had plenty of opportunity for reflection. Had Wanda deliberately chosen to sacrifice me in the interests of Poland, or had she simply been trailed to our rendezvous in the Tiergarten? I never knew.

The following day I left Berlin.







PART FIVE

THE FORSAKEN

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

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I REACHED Hamburg with a few marks in my pocket and carrying an old torn valise. The fog was thick. I strolled down the Reeperbahn. St. Pauli teemed with small hangouts. Whores accosted one at every corner. "Come along, *mein Süßer!*" I had a bad cold, a worse temper, and drove them off with hoarse expletives.

At a little restaurant some Filipino sailors were trying to convert into cash a document headed with an American eagle. Across their shoulders I could see that it was a naturalization certificate. A dark-skinned man was bargaining for it. I ate fish and chips for twenty-five pfennigs. When the place closed at three, I loitered wearily along the docks.

"Hands up!" cried a voice behind me.

It was two armed policemen asking for my identification papers. With shining white gloves they restored the nickel-barrelled guns to their belts.

From a distance I heard the sound of firing.

"Red Front hooligans," grumbled the *Schupo*.

I decided it would be safer not to register at a hotel. At the Grosse Freiheit that night I met Greta. Her beat was near the Alstertor. She took me to her place after 3 a.m., abandoning hope of a customer. The bed was clean.

In the morning we went out for coffee. Greta asked me to stay in Hamburg with her. Her man had been in jail for some months. She would share her earnings with me if I would "hang around" . . . But I told her I couldn't stay, I must get a ship.

She clung to me with one hand, the other thrust into her coat pocket for warmth. "Never mind, then," she said, and she

. .



turned her face away and coughed into her handkerchief.

All day I searched for a boat, any boat sailing anywhere—if only it took me from Germany! I was frightened at shadows and, if someone passed close to me, I would back against the wall and make a grab as though for a weapon, to suggest that I was armed. At night fatigue drove me back to Greta's. She had a customer.

"Who's that?" she shouted. "I don't know you. Be off!"

The following nights I spent on a Hauptbahnhof bench reading and re-reading the newspapers.

At the Greek consulate I found a minor employee who spoke a little German. He told me the *Agios Gerasimos* would sail from Cuxhaven at six. I was engaged as stoker at three pounds sterling per month. I had a passport but no seaman's papers, and was merely replacing a stoker who had not returned to his ship.

The *Agios Gerasimos* was a dirty five-thousand-ton collier, one of many such small freighters bearing the white cross on a blue ground and trailing their dirty hulks from the Yellow Sea to Valparaiso. I went down the stinking hatchway to my hammock, dog-tired but unable to sleep.

The crew was a mixture, a few Chinese, Negroes from Angola, and Rumanians, with a preponderance of Greeks from the Ionian Isles, good sailors working for a pittance. The company was retrenching and Greece had no unions.

The ship's captain was absolute master of the vessel and one's very life was in his hands. He was a stubby little man with eyes like ripe olives and a double chin, wearing a jersey. His belly hung out over his belt and a fat cigar was clenched in the corner of his mouth. As six o'clock approached he began giving shrill orders in Greek. The last stevedores were leaving the gangplank. The hatches were closed. The boat was heavily loaded and wallowing deep in the water. We passed a Japanese and a Danish vessel and sailed out of the mouth of the Elbe. Land faded from sight. It was a very cold March day in 1929 when I left Germany.

We had four-hour shifts in the stokehole. I went on at seven o'clock. Stripped to the waist and gripping an immense shovel, I flung coal into the firepit. In my shift were two Negroes and a Greek, all bony and hollow-chested, but much better stokers than I. The ship began to roll from side to side. Sometimes a sudden jolt would fling me close to the furnace and the red flame scorched my face. The Negroes laughed at my clumsi-



ness. The third engineer complained that my boiler was as good as useless, and that I wasn't a stoker, and what the hell did they mean at the consulate by putting a son-of-a-bitch like me in this f—ing job. After four hours of strenuous work I tumbled into my corner.

In the middle of the night I was awakened by a dig of the Negro's foot. "It's our shift again."

The gruelling task was resumed. I whistled the "Volga Boatman's Song". The Black whistled the "Internationale". The Greek began crooning one of those endless Eastern chants that go "aman—aman".

The second day there was a violent storm. The boilers were closed down and we were confined to quarters. A seaman was swept from the bridge. I clung to an iron bar to avoid being tossed to the ceiling and coming down with a cracked skull.

My first direct impressions of England were derived from the cities of Cardiff, Penarth, and the Barry Docks. From the Victoria Pier to Cardiff proper was an hour's walk. The cold was terrific and I was wearing tattered shoes and a light top-coat. I shivered as with an ague. The Rumanian cook and I had set out together. We found some other sailors, also from a Greek collier, in a pub. The English talked through their teeth, spat brown tobacco juice, and stayed by themselves. The thermometer was dropping every moment; we were due back at midnight. There was a dance hall where girls lined the benches. Inane-looking youths in baggy grey trousers were doing the Charleston. After each few dances the orchestra would stop and play "God Save the King". Instantly the sporty youths would drop their partners and spring to rigid attention. A minute later the wild Black Bottom would start again. The cook won favour with a big red-haired girl. Together they achieved incredible evolutions.

Then a fight broke out between the crews of two Spanish vessels. Glass whirled through the smoke-infested air and chairs and benches were overturned. Tall, beefy bobbies, looking taller for their pointed helmets, hauled everyone off to police court. We got back to the *Agios Gerasimos* towards morning. Everyone was asleep. Someone had vomited on deck and it made a hideous stench. The air was stuffy in our bunkroom. I lay in my hammock and thought about this nation of fogs, huge cranes, vast smoky cities—and sickly Welsh coalminers. Could such men be of the same nationality as the Britishers I had encountered in Berlin and Paris bars?



I had earlier gained some ideas about this other England, the England of Oxford and Cambridge. I had met young Englishmen of sportsmanlike bearing and clerical accent. They spoke proudly of the Empire; they evoked the ancient dignity of blackened stone softened by ivy, sweeps of turf, stately quadrangles, great halls vast as churches on whose immemorial walls hung portraits of bewigged, robed jurists. Their own faces were massively framed, calm in the assurance of regal power and carrying their world rule lightly. Now I added to my picture the mist-shrouded cliffs fronting perilous seas, the open-faced, severe-looking pilots, the rowdy ale-houses, the miners' cadaverous forms as they went coughing to their work in the chill grey of early morning. The English seamen had none of the splendid élan with which their more glorious young compatriots smashed crew-race records, to the applause of well-groomed multitudes lining the leafy river banks. But the Welsh miners also were part of England, a working class differing in no respect from the proletariat in France and Germany, unless in their being a shade more wretched and impoverished and racked by worse coughs.

The rocks and cliffs dropped away as I was meditating on the two Englands. Ships passed us imperiously flying the Union Jack. Their smokestacks were veritable towers and their bridges were piled up in stories. The last beacons faded from view and we were in the open sea, which was still of a menacing grey. Clouds hung low, but the wind was rising. Seasickness ensued. In the morning we could see the Breton coast in the distance, a land of granite. How well I knew its rugged grey cliffs, sparse herbage and occasional battered oaks! And what æons seemed to have elapsed since a trip I had made there with schoolmates from Fontainebleau! We had recited lines of the poet José Maria de Heredia. Often I had sat in the surf on those rocks, beaten by the savage waves. My dreams then were doubtless of distant shores and white frigates under full sail, as the breath of the North Atlantic bore to me visions of far lands, foreign climates, strange races. I loved Brittany, St. Malo and its granite boulders. The engine throbbed.

"Foul weather ahead," said the oiler as he passed my coal door.

"Stinking bit of sea here!" The Rumanian added, "*Kus omach!*" an Arabic oath disrespectful to one's mother, and drew angry glances from the Mohammedan blacks.

We were heading towards Gibraltar. The foul air in the stokehole was intolerable. I vomited. Stretched on my



hammock, under a coat, I thought of many things. My hands were sore and the palms swollen. I tried to throw off the actual, a habit I had formed to overcome physical ills. When I have a tooth pulled, for example, I try to concentrate on some particular idea, an historical scene like an execution in Louis XVI's time or a proclamation of Danton's to the Jacobins.

Now, for instance, passing Cape Finisterre, I tried to picture the indecisive encounter, four months before Austerlitz, between Napoleon's Admiral Villeneuve and the English Admiral Calder. Meanwhile I was assailed upon both sides by snores and scarcely less monotonous Arab chants. It was getting rougher—the waves beat dully over the collier's deck. The paraffin lamp crashed into a corner and was shattered. The tempest was unleashed.

The fourth day out from the Victoria Dock, as we were entering the Gulf of Lions, a furious storm broke. I seemed to have made not a dent in the coal. My pile looked actually bigger. The Negro laughed at my troubles. He had worked on the boat for years and was getting four pounds per month. He told me his dream was to save another fifty pounds sterling and go home to Angola. With a hundred pounds he would be rich, could pick any woman for a wife, and buy many cows. The Rumanian spent all he had on the women of Mediterranean ports. At German and Dutch ports he considered they charged too much. He generally changed his ship at Marseilles; there he would be drunk for a week and the ship would have sailed before he sobered up. On this trip he suffered from acute gonorrhea and lay groaning all night.

I vomited steadily during all the trip across the Bay of Biscay. Lying flat on my belly, I could work only half the time, and had to have substitutes. When the weather improved a bit, the captain called me to his cabin and questioned me in bad French, pronouncing his *s*'s like *z*'s. He asked if I'd like to be his cabin steward instead of stoking. I was glad of a chance to be above decks and breathe the salt air. A north wind blew in gusts, bringing hail.

Captain Janopoulos was a repulsive figure. He had short, fat hands and black-nailed fingers. I had a rum with him and went to bed on the couch in the chart room. He went out on deck. It must have been late that night when I woke with a start to find someone near me and sitting on the end of the bed. Then I discovered the captain's little black eyes and his coarse paws gripping the coverlet near my head. In an instant I understood everything. As though in a dream I heard his



nasal voice and his strange proposal. I might have known from his getting me to sleep there.

I gave him a shove and he fell over on his back. At this moment the steamer rolled and tables, chairs, dishes, and the lamp crashed into a corner. We fought tooth and nail. He was stocky, possibly drunk, for he stank of rum, and infuriated. We each landed some blows on the jaw. Then I saw him draw from his pocket a small revolver. I had to act quickly. I grabbed up a chair and threw it at him. The lamp was extinguished and the cabin was now pitch black and comparatively quiet. I tiptoed to the door, found the handle, and jumped down the couple of steps outside. I had to grip the rail with all my strength, for the wind blew a gale and the decks were awash. I do not know how I made my way to the stern. I slipped into the firemen's quarters. The Negroes were asleep and the Rumanian was snoring. My fists tightened with anger.

I spent the rest of the voyage with irons on my wrists. Captain Janopoulos accused me of having attempted to rob the ship's safe and of spreading Communist propaganda on board, a timely notion on his part, since our first stops would be at the Italian Fascist ports of Venice and Ravenna. I protested vainly. The first engineer interceded with the captain and obtained additions to my diet of soup and bread.

It seemed centuries before the Italian coast came in sight. Some young men in the green uniform of the Fascist constabulary and wearing revolvers at their belts appeared on the deck of the *Agios Gerasimos* and took me in charge.

I was taken to the Piazza Santa Catarina and into an old building adorned with two shields, one inscribed "Fascist Service of Public Security", the other bearing the colours of Italy's reigning family. A man in civil clothes read me the charges the captain had brought against me, that I was a Bolshevik and had encouraged the seamen to mutiny. My case would come up the next week before a special court. Meanwhile I was flung into a big room with a lot of other prisoners. Through the iron bars we could watch all the life of the market-place and the pulsations of the beautiful city.

Venice was a dream. Hot sun beat through the window-panes. Crowds of people were strolling. Loud-speakers were broadcasting an address by Mussolini. I found a man with some grasp of French who interpreted for me. He had been a journalist but had spent the last four years moving from one jail to another. He was now on his way to the central political prison at Ravenna. The young *squadrists* treated him as a bit



cracked. He described himself as Dr. Cattorini of Milan, a doctor of philosophy.

Our lights were extinguished. The night sounds of Venice floated in, laughter and the gondoliers' songs. Then the lights of the piazza faded out and fog muffled the canals. Dr. Cattorini began telling me of his past—of the narrow streets of the old city of Milan, its young journalists and lawyers and of the endless socialistic confabs at little tables in dimly lit cafés. For example, there was a small restaurant on the outskirts of Milan, on Via Castel Morre, near the Porta di Venezia, where a meal cost three and a half lire. There Cattorini and his socialist friends sat late at night. A black-clad woman would come in, leading by the hand her daughter Edda. Benito Mussolini would rise and go out with them, his wife Rachele and Edda—they would be swallowed up in the obscurity of the narrow streets. But the talk at the restaurant went on. "A good brain, this young man, Mussolini!" "A good head," someone would repeat.

At that time life was tranquil enough in the cities of Italy. There was singing and serenading in the streets; folks were happy. But that man, who had vanished into the night, was to alter Italy's aspect, and bring an end to the singing, the serenading, the joy, and the tranquil tenor of life. Aureoled as a Caesar, he became Il Duce, a sort of demigod worshipped by a howling mob of fanatics. "But I would not stoop to flatter this adventurer, this megalomaniac," Cattorini went on. "And so here I am—now in one prison, now in another." He paused and scratched a crown sparsely covered with grey hair. "They offered me the co-editorship of the *Popolo d'Italia* with Ansaldo Mussolini." His dark, hollow eyes flashed. "Duce, Premier of Italy and with all your other portfolios, Knight of the Order of the Sant' Annunziata, cousin of His Majesty—bah! you have nobly betrayed your friends, your principles, your ideals! All plastered with medals and leading a rabble in arms. Forgotten, the past, the great cause of Socialism. Bah, the phrases—the contradictions! Here he was in November, 1921, at the General Convention of the Fascist Party: 'Economically we are liberals. The conduct of the nation's economic life must be taken over by collective organizations and by the bureaucracy!' Two years later, before the National Congress of Corporations, he thrust out his jaw, made Caesarian gestures, and announced, to frenzied acclaim: 'The government cannot take over the organization of the functions of a nation's economic life.'



"So what really resulted? A so-called corporative system directed by a privileged clique, bacchanalian celebrations to the glory of Fascism, Fascist skulduggery, dictator drunk with power, a Blackshirt chivalry, 'Champions of the oppressed,' murderers of the innocent and law-abiding.

"Endless solecisms and unequivocal disaster ever since the march on Rome to the rescue of the Milanese and Genoese industrialists. What measures taken, what remedies applied? Tyrant! Spiteful schemer! Is it empire you'd be at? And your party leaders the refuse of human society! Farinacci and Mutti, who organized pogroms at Ravenna! Turati, a sex maniac. Remember that story, the girls' boarding school? And Signor Bombacchi, who used to run on the Communist ticket, photographed with Comintern leaders. His head showed up most impressively—you can still see it in old magazines kicking around Europe. Then Signor Virginio Gayda, that worthy journalist—he was former Italian head of propaganda at the St. Petersburg embassy, talented, independent—now your acolyte, too—takes your orders, executes your Machiavellian schemes.

"Some had the luck to escape to Paris, to New York. But I—year after year, I have suffered much . . . the Fascist police stop at nothing . . . simple people puffed up with martial self-conceit . . ." Cattorini talked on, half to me, half to his enemy. I was dropping asleep but still caught intermittent expressions: "For nothing . . . cowards . . . five, eight years, ten . . . Matteotti . . ." In the morning Cattorini had disappeared. They had put him in solitary.

My cross-examination was short and was begun in Italian. I understood nothing and refused to sign any paper. I heard the words "Russian" and "Communist" repeated. The man who questioned me was impeccably dressed and wore a silk shirt with long points to the soft collar; he looked like a movie actor. The questioning seemed to bore him. He stopped several times to telephone and, from his tone, it was clear he was talking with women. The first was Francesca; then Mabel. The examination was resumed in the afternoon; they brought in a man with black spectacles who spoke French. He stammered and was more intimidated by the whole proceeding than I. A detachment of Fascist Youth passed under the windows singing. The commissioner must have been quarrelling with his Francesca or Mabel, for he was in a wretched humour. He exuded a thick cloud of gardenia scent. Another commissioner, Signor Vecchi from the OVRA,\* who was bald,

\* Opera Volontaria Repressione Antifascista.



had a snub nose, wore a black shirt and a patchwork of decorations, stared at me stupidly, as though I were a museum piece. He asked me the same questions a hundred times.

"Russian?"

"Yes."

"Bolshevik?"

"No."

"How'd you get Greek citizenship? You belong to the Party?"

Several times he brought out a portfolio, hunted out a page and put his finger on a newspaper cut showing a group of young persons.

"That's him, that's him to the life," he repeated. "What were you doing at Brindisi in 1923?" he asked. "Hey, what, I ask you? Isn't that you?"

I stared for the twentieth time at the photograph. It was not I. The photo was faded, showed only half the face, and had been marred by the stamp of the Fascist commissariat of Bari.

"You know who these others are? You admit it's you?"

"It's not me."

"Absurd! No question it's him."

"You'll say nothing more? Then you'd better sign this paper."

"No. You can shove it ———." I put that expostulation in Russian.

"What's that? Speak up." His face reddened.

I repeated it. It was safe enough—he didn't understand Russian.

The Don Juan of the silk shirt bent over the old newspaper clipping. He explained that in 1923 I must have been very young and could not be the man of the photo. They argued at length, forgetting I was there, and appealed to an aged cripple who was refilling the ink bottles, and to the excellent woman who brought in a steaming plate of spaghetti for the *carabinieri*, young men in romantic tricorues, who looked like the supernumeraries in *Carmen*. They made a tremendous racket eating their spaghetti, so that my attention was often drawn away from the subject in hand.

Signor Vecchi persisted that I had been guilty of Communist agitation among seamen in Italian ports and hence must be kept in jail. Meanwhile he strongly recommended a castor-oil cure. The argument dragged on for days. Finally the cinematic official, from his wide acquaintance among women, brought in one of about forty, a bona fide blonde, I concluded,



with cold blue eyes and austere features, wearing a smart sports coat. She was neither Francesca nor Mabel; he addressed her as Vera Nikolaevna.

I talked to her at some length. She spoke Russian and, indeed, the particular brand of Russian with guttural *r*'s that Russian aristocrats sometimes affect. Theatre posters were being displayed at this time in all the urinals of Venice announcing appearances of the famous actress Tatiana Pavlova, rumoured to be Il Duce's mistress, who had at one time been intimate with my stepfather. Vera Nikolaevna telephoned Pavlova, who happened to be in Venice staying at the Hotel Danieli. The actress declined to see me but said she knew the names I had given the commissioner. This was a statement coming from high authority—the Duce's intimate. I was freed the same day.

My first impulse was to bash in the Greek ship master's face, but the *Agios Gerasimos* had sailed. It was spring in Venice. Birds sang. Tourists carrying cameras strolled in white costumes. I crossed the Ponte Rialto. The Piazza San Marco teemed with life and colour. I was under police surveillance and had to leave the country within a week—take the first Greek boat "home". The experience had not been agreeable but at least I had suffered this time no such brutalities as I had from the Warsaw police.

I loitered along the canals with my hands in my pockets, whistling familiar operatic airs. I ate my first real meal in a restaurant near the *Canale Grande*. The quart of Chianti in its thick bulbous bottle and the steaming plate of spaghetti were nectar and ambrosia. Liberty, the spring, the blue Adriatic! I sloughed off the horrors of the stokehole, the Alexanderplatz, the Fascists. An Austrian book dealer gave me some books to read. German and Austrian girls, tourists, were strolling with officers, who seemed not so much soldiers as figures from a harlequinade. They were corseted and wore patent leather boots and white gloves. Some wore high shakos. Green, red, and light blue were in evidence but green predominated. The *bersaglieri* wore plumes. The rank and file, in pointed green hats and capes, looked like dwarfs or gnomes of the forest.

They were playing the overture to *Aida* in the Piazza San Marco. Tourists in white trousers and nonchalant sports jackets were ordering *apéritifs*. Immaculate waiters moved in and out among the tables carrying, high above their heads, trays laden with varicoloured bottles.

I sensed that a man was shadowing me. I stopped abruptly



before a shop that sold novelties and souvenirs of Venice. The shadow stopped, too. It was young and well-mannered and had the Fascist insignia in its buttonhole. Frankly admitting that he was assigned to watch me until I boarded ship, he joined me in taking a "caffè espresso". He spoke a little French and had told me his whole life before we finished our coffee. He came from Cremona and had long been without a job when he joined the Fascist militia, which brought him two hundred lire a month. His dream was to rejoin his uncle, a building contractor in New York. Giovanni took me home to dinner with friends and after a copious meal we all went in a jolly mood to have a look at the women. The brothel was full of the green-uniformed dwarfs awaiting their turns. On the wall hung a proclamation of the military intendant at Venice, defining the visiting hours and prices. Truly, a well-organized country.

Giovanni stressed the new order in the nation. Pimps no longer accosted foreigners in the streets, and I had seen for myself that rugged individualism had been banished from the brothels. Formerly one no sooner set foot on Italian soil than one was approached by a rascal in a broad-brimmed hat and picturesque sash, who swept a deep bow and offered his services as guide, recommending himself as the leading "ruffian" of Naples or of Venice. Now the churches were thronged day and night; bells rang incessantly for the Masses. Loud-speakers broadcast Il Duce's gospels. The Fascist militia went up and down the smelly canals in every sort of motorboat. The gondoliers flung oaths after them, "*Porca madonna*", in falsetto or baritone. But the words died in the white foam of their wakes.

One was never out of sight of portraits of Il Duce and of Victor Emmanuel. Even in the brothel, by the little table with syringes of various sizes and bottles of permanganate of potash, Benito's Caesarian face was in evidence. A large nail pierced the headdress with hanging plumes, which fell to the level of the heavy out-thrust chin.

A patrician, tall, elegant, distinguished, white-bearded, and with decorations in his lapel, was examining my papers in a palazzo on the canal. The feeling of wealth was pervasive—in the ancient tapestries, the renaissance paintings, the long draperies, embroidered with the lion of Venice, at the windows. Great sombre splashes of sunlight, blue, yellow, and red, fell on walls and floor. All was tradition and taste. A Greek Orthodox friar in a black cowl sat at a table copying with a quill pen a document which he held in his other hand. No



sounds penetrated from outside. The honorary Greek consul returned my papers with an air of disdain. He spoke in clipped sentences. I was to sail on a ship of the Anglo-Hellenic Line to North Africa. He made a tired gesture and cautioned me against returning to Italy. There were flowers all about the room, violets, jasmine, hyacinths—in vases and in bowls. One hardly smelt the canal. I would have liked to linger in these calm and beautiful surroundings.

A gondola hung suspended and motionless for an instant against the background of the *Canale Grande*; it sharpened and crystallized one's perception of the loveliness of Venice. Misfortune had made me especially sensitive to moments of beauty and happiness. Gaily dressed crowds continued passing; one caught the rhythm of music, melody, a languorous tango, a gondolier singing "Santa Lucia". The canals were black now. The gondolas glided slowly. I had some lire in my pocket. I was young, strong, alive. My heart fluttered with emotion. There were girls with brown locks, sensual, ironic, appealing faces, and young tourists from the north whose glances were curious, melancholy, provocative. Looking down at my ragged clothes, I burst out laughing. A few people paused, astonished that a young man dressed in a grubby shirt and trousers should be laughing so happily, laughing from the depths of his soul. An ineffable calm and sweetness welled up in me, gratitude for my escapes. Every face seemed to smile at me—faces of the black-haired women with half-open lips. If one of them had stopped, taken me by the arm, led me to the cathedral of the Virgin, and there knelt with me—then my happiness would have been complete. In those days I would have given much to forget Wanda. Lying on my bed, I would meditate for hours, recalling every incident of my reunion with her. But I was alone, alone in this world with my fantasies of a Venetian carnival—and love. The Doge's Palace was lighted. The Hotel Danieli overflowed with gay company. There were boats full of pleasure-seekers setting off for the Lido. A masked ball was in progress at the Hotel Excelsior: some Americans were reviving the eighteenth century. In an obscure tavern I finished my wine, scallops, spaghetti, and laid aside the white napkin. I leaned one forearm heavily on the round table and thought of what was and would be.

Next day the steamship *Chalkis* would carry me far from here—again there would be the stokehole, rotten canned goods, browbeaten seamen, and gross captains.



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*CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT*

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AND NOW EVERYTHING was erased; the lagoons had melted away, and the cypresses, and the lace-like shores of Venice. The Adriatic gleamed with an oily smoothness—not a wave, scarcely even a ripple. The engines ground. We passed a white ship of the Lloyd Triestino Line. Music drifted to us from her deck; there were blue and red lanterns and white-clad dancers. As the land fell away, I closed my eyes. The soft music, the rhythm—it all passed, all was swept away into the vortex of time and space. I drew lungfuls of air. The hours passed and I was still leaning on the rail, in tattered clothes, my face smeared, tired and dirty, but shining with happiness, eager for experience and acquaintance with every extreme.

There were months of stoking. We skirted the dry, scorching coast of Saharan Africa. For days and nights we were coasting along West African soil. That shore seemed an endless desolation. One saw only the ocean of dryness that the natives call the *Bled el Ateuch*, or “Land of Thirst”—a country of innumerable featureless beaches, melancholy dunes that were coterminous with the horizon, so that the view inland exposed only more murderous excesses of heat. Moorish cities rose from the sands, with a few palms, a mosque and some flat houses dried to the bone by the pitiless sun. And then Dakar. A magnificent roadstead, that of Dakar, capital of French West Africa, and the only important seaport between Casablanca and the Cape of Good Hope.

Everything there, the steps and the narrow streets broiling in the African sun, spoke of Maréchal Lyautey, builder of the French Colonial Empire. France owed much to Senegal. From 1914 to 1918, it was second only to Russia in providing cannon fodder. The giant Senegalese met the German machine-gun fire, advancing rank after rank with their knives in their teeth, and falling by the thousands. The dusky and ragged forms of survivors drag their wooden legs through the streets. The Senegalese cough a great deal, for they bore the brunt of the



first experiments with gas on the Western front. The indolent colonial petty officials, of lower middle-class origin, discoursed about how Lyautey contrived miraculously to transform a wild and barbarous region into an orderly nation, introducing the industry and commerce of an exemplary colony of the Third Republic.

But the colonial genius who created Casablanca and the Maghreb and organized Morocco had scarcely time to make a beginning in Senegal. Better for the Senegalese if they could have belonged to Portugal or Lithuania. Then, at least, they would not have been used as experimental guinea pigs at the front. Now they scratched their infected and infested chests, under the plaques set up to immortalize French generalissimos, or they went to two-franc movies featuring ten-year-old Max Linder pictures.

The French have been famous—doubtless shocking to many—for not drawing the colour line. Thus, I remembered my physics and chemistry professor of the Lycée Michelet, who, though black as shoe polish, enjoyed recognition in Paris as a mathematician. M. Sénac had married a Frenchwoman, who bore him two café-au-lait coloured children. He was decorated with the Legion of Honour and was a finished gentleman as well as a scientist and man of broad culture. One day he was sitting over *apéritifs* at the Café du Dome with that distinguished mathematician, the aged Martinand—the latter, with his red ears, black hat and drooping moustaches, a pillar of socialism and well-known to many generations of students. Two men, speaking English, remonstrated to a waiter at being led to a table next to a Negro.

Martinand stared at them with savage irony and then said, in his broken English, “Messieurs, it is you who are the Negroes here”.

They went off muttering, pursued by Martinand’s chuckles.

A disciple of Jaurès and an Academician, Martinand had won his Legion of Honour, not purchased it in the fashion of the post-war cynics.

The principles of liberty and equality, as applying to race, were exemplified under the Third Republic with less agreeable effect in colonial brothels. Black men and French white women went upstairs together. The white women even performed, to impress Negro clients, certain tricks I shall not describe beyond saying that nothing could have been less consistent with notions of white superiority. No, the colour line was not drawn, and yet French Colonial policy seemed to



have developed in much the same fashion as any other nation's and to have kept the barrier between the colonizers and the colonized just as clearly and sharply defined.

I had left ship at Dakar, still hoping to get passage for some South American port. Instead, I sailed on a dirty two-thousand-ton Portuguese hulk whose herculean one-eyed captain was always drunk and took even Russians on board. For weeks our ship sailed up and down the West African coast, making stops of a few days each at the dreary cities of that vast land. The deck was burning hot, the bridge dirty and untidy. A little white city with sparse yellow palms would be sighted, towers of Moorish houses, asleep in the blazing sunlight. Our crew, Tunisians, Algerians, Sicilians and Senegalese, leaned over the rail. The white light was blinding. The captain would show his sleepy ill-shaven face on the bridge. Long pirogues, with outriders and bows like the jaws of a fish, would approach the *Ste. Catherine*, manned by Senegalese who rowed standing up. The black Herculesees would come aboard; they thought nothing of bearing sacks of three hundred pounds on their broad muscular backs. An ill-shaven customs officer would vanish with his documents into the captain's cabin.

Gradually, occupied as I was with hopes and endeavours of my own, reduced as I was by the ordeal of the torrid heat and glaring light and baffled by the complexity of the races and the strata of civilizations in Africa, I began to get hold of some clues and form a sort of picture of the life in the African colonies.

All these cities were built on the beaches. They had no harbours and no communications with the interior. The straight, flat coastline was as uninviting as that of the Sahara. There was a line of white buildings and these tapered off into great human ant heaps along the shore, straw huts and flimsy cabins where the Negro population swarmed. Each city had its "*Cafés des Tirailleurs*", run by broken-down drabs from the notorious Rue des Belles Feuilles in the Vieux Port of Marseilles and comprising a store, bar, restaurant and brothel. A non-com was always to be seen, his bottom planted in a chair, being plied by white, *café-au-lait*, and chocolate girls, with apéritifs at forty sous. Patrons and prostitutes smelt foul.

In wretchedly stocked little shops, children with fly-tormented eyes were working leather or weaving. A woman was spinning with an odd bow-like implement. Other women crouched in the shadow of the booths before piles of wool; the whites of their eyes showed startingly in contrast with their



sombre draperies. The men sprawled in the street, sheltered by awnings which covered their merchandise from noon until six o'clock. When the scorching heat moderated, some whites appeared, mopping their necks with great handkerchiefs. They looked drugged with sleep, though they had been napping since noon. They were stupefied by the heat, drunken and foul-tempered after too long a stay in the Sahara region.

At sunrise the pistons throbbed again and we started to the next port of call. Miles of greenish waves slid past. There were shiny, oily patches about the prow. The engines throbbed. With a sinuous, vine-like motion the waters climbed the vessel's sides. The shore faded out. Dusk fell, bringing respite from the fearful heat. One recovered enough animation to recall the girls at the Hôtel de Paris, or whatever fine name it was called, their paint-smeared and dripping flesh dotted with blue spots left by inexpert injections, the glassy eyes with enlarged pupils that told of drug-addiction. But what matter! Their eyes were provocative, their expression sometimes affectionate, sometimes touching—those big suffering Arab eyes that seemed to be half of the face. And one was so alone in the world. Only sailors know such loneliness.

What were vermin, dirt, and the virtual certainty of infection as against the purchase of oblivion for a few hours? Oblivion, too, in which there was some stir of wistful remembrance, echoes from younger, happier times, evocations of a first love? There were moments of reverie and abstraction in which the face became lighted with the old smile of tenderness. Somehow the prostitutes learned to recognize these moments with yearning. "Stay a little longer," they would say, turning on you dog-like, pleading eyes. "Rest a bit!"

And then you went back to the boat quieted—as by the healing of some half-remembered happy dream. The wastes of sea stretched to the horizon. You leaned on the rail, and once more the Black Continent sank from view behind a liquid heaving line that had the glitter of steel.

I went down a squalid ladder. In the darkness of the between-decks, shadows flitted past noiselessly to their hammocks. I heard the limping step of Sergei, the Russian cook. He was not yet sober. Formerly in Kornilov's army, he was seldom sober and always swore like a trooper. All the aromas of Oriental cookery clung to him, for he never changed his filthy clothes. He had many functions on board, and was ship's doctor as well as cook. Now four syringes were lying



in the bread pan. Half the crew had been to the brothel and he was treating them at twenty sous per injection. One after another they emerged from the kitchen, clasping their bellies.

"Aha, me boys, it hurts!"

The cook guffawed. "It hurts, what? If you have fun, you have to pay for it!"

Sergei was one of the sources to which, under stress of great deprivation, one might look for comfort. He was covered with bayonet scars and shot wounds. His chest was a shambles. At times the wounds reopened. Then he drank heavily, and we would find bits of wood and metal in the soup. He was a typical sergeant of the former Tsar's army, illiterate, pious, superstitious. I was never able to understand why he left his village to join the White armies; often he would ask himself that question. He was now alone in the world, for the village had been wiped out by famine. He would come on deck with his guitar, and then an old Russian song would re-echo along the shores of black Africa: "Volga, Volga, soil of Russia . . ." Our two voices and the broken-stringed guitar must have produced an odd impression on the Moors who surrounded us, "the infidel Tartars", as Sergei called them. When I knew him, Sergei's nose was a horrid cleft; he claimed that was congenital and hereditary in his family. On shipboard one simply could not afford to be too fastidious—or even fastidious at all. I look back to Sergei with gratitude. He mitigated the hardship of my severance from all earlier associations. Without his little proverbs and his laughter through yellowed teeth, I should possibly have cracked up.

Then, too, there were moments, as I have earlier suggested, when I sought some form of self-expression in thought or imagination, or recalling fragments of my haphazardly acquired culture. I remember that halfway between the African coast and the granite volcanic islands of that mysterious archipelago which includes the Canaries, Madeira, the Cape Verde group and the Azores, I began to dwell with delight on the legend and tradition of the lost continent of Atlantis, from Plato's allusions down to Pierre Benoit's novels about it, and Jules Verne's ingenious romance. Space fails me to cite such authors as Pliny, Marcellin, Tertullian, Sherer, and Tournefort, who have dealt with this fascinating subject, not to mention the eminent men who have gone on record as sceptics. The company of great names and the stimulus of such speculation became my recourse when the talk all around me dwelt with too little variation on adventures at the last brothel.



I found myself grateful for teachers like Martinand and Lapaire—yes, and even the irascible Dr. Scholle—for having afforded me hints of a wider horizon than was open to most of my mates.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

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THE MARKET PLACE—or *Souk*—at Mogador was a singular and colourful tableau of Oriental life, an animated vision from the *Thousand and One Nights*, with its houses of red-brown pise, its donkeys led by Biblical apparitions. Arabs, Jews, Berbers, Sudanese, and Armenians, in burnouses of every hue, frock coats, and striped *jellabahs*, were arguing, gesticulating, and elbowing their way through the crowd of children, goats, and donkeys. Commodities of every shape and colour were set forth in baskets, sacks and cages. There were rugs, bronze and copper wares, dates, olives, freshly tanned skins, raw skins still bloody, scented oils, sheep and goats. The sun poured over all its blinding light, to which the populace added a babel of deafening and guttural speech. In the midst of all, a barber was shaving heads, using an inverted basin to make sure of an even circle.

Children clung to my jacket, begging for sous or offering to take me to their sister. They made meaningful gestures with their fingers. "Sister—pretty—twelve years old—five francs."

Native soldiers in khaki and Foreign Legionnaires strolled idly by. In the middle of the market square was a Moorish-style fountain, where veiled women gathered for chatter and to fill their jugs. Two men in indigo burnouses snored on the ground in front of the hotel where I had been waiting four weeks for a ship to the Cape of Good Hope. The sky was blue and cloudless. A ventilator rotated above the desk in the lobby. Over the hotel entrance hung a dirty-brown awning. On either side of the dusty avenue that led to the sea were old houses and villas occupied by officers of the garrison and officials, an importer of Czech commodities, a rug exporter,



and the Armenian money-changer who was known as the richest man in the place. Here, too, you found the Café Metropole, the *bureau de tabac*, "the Cannebière"; in the Place de Paris was a theatre with wooden seats and a creaky projector, that showed ancient movies twice a week. Then there was the post office, the police commissariat and the mosque with its gleaming white minaret dominating the whole.

Exhausted by the white glare all around, I withdrew to fling myself on my bed. From the window I could see in one direction a distant panorama of palm gardens; the palms dwindled in size till they shaded off into the thousand-kilometre expanse of the desert. On the other side was the stir of the port—that is, a few hogsheads were being rolled along a pier by a couple of flea-bitten Arabs. How long should I be delayed here? I could get no encouragement from the commission merchant for a Marseilles export firm, who was nominally the Greek consul. Among his barrels of olives, bags of figs, and agricultural tools, he displayed a cast-metal shield with the arms of the Hellenic Republic; four other escutcheons indicated that Mr. Diamantopoulos represented also Albania, Lithuania, Costa Rica, and Haiti. On his table were a battered Remington, documents in all languages and the stamps of his four consulates. Occasionally he would sell a passport if he found a customer with some money—which was seldom; as, for instance, whenever a fugitive from justice tried to get to South America, or when someone who had escaped from Guiana tried to return to Europe. One day a genuine Lithuanian had asked to be repatriated, being ill. Diamantopoulos, at a loss, solved the problem by simply relinquishing his delicate post as diplomatic agent of the Baltic republic. He was sleeping in a dilapidated armchair when I entered. The ventilator was awl. Hundreds of huge black flies swarmed about.

"No ships," Diamantopoulos muttered. His reply was familiar.

I had interrupted his nap. It was nearly two, but the siesta lasted until five. My few francs were dwindling but there was no ship in this foul *bled*. I went back to my close-shuttered room. The water was tepid and tasted abominable. The tiny room was kept broiling by an incandescent red crack in the blinds. I waited for night, falling temperature and a sea breeze, listening with the sensitiveness of raw nerves for the whistle of a steamship. No whistle blew. I chewed my pillow with rage. Days passed. The British honorary consul refused all help. The German vice-consul, Herr Stängel, had twice



lent me a fifty-franc note. The last time I went there his hard-eyed Swedish wife had told me stiffly he was out. My papers and permit to remain would soon expire. The French are strict in their colonies and protectorates. The tricolour flag above the commissariat drew me. My last hope was the Foreign Legion; I would enlist in that celebrated band of the glorious French army. I had heard the stories told in taverns and bistros of North African ports by deserters from the Legion. "March or starve, march or starve"—that phrase repeated itself in my head constantly.

I paused on the steps of the white building with the tricolour. A man dressed in white and with upturned moustache looked at me questioningly.

"You again?"

He laid down his pen. His glassy eyes and his whole air were typical of the alcoholic official of the Colonial French Administration. His shirt collar was open, exposing the white skin of his chest. He had a bottle of absinthe on his table.

"You're not going to ask me for money? It's enough that you've had your permit extended. We've plenty mixed-breeds here already. Chaps like you, Monsieur—"

I interrupted his flow of words to ask if one could enlist here in the Foreign Legion.

"The Legion, eh?" He made a pitying gesture. "Fill this out and come back in a couple of days." He handed me a printed blank. "But tell me, why are you always questioning the nomads, the merchants, the young and the old? We've been keeping an eye on you, you see. So much curiosity. Come, now, you're not planning to turn Mohammedan, are you? Or are you a seamen's organizer? Start anything of that sort here and I'll clap you in jail for the rest of your life."

I babbled something about humane motives and trying to understand the miseries of the local populace.

With a hand that shook, he poured himself some water and set down the carafe. "Miseries of the populace, my ass! Get out! They'll take that out of you in the regiment." He added some angry remark about syndicalism in France.

I had seen him suave enough with upper-class men and women, clad in white—tourists, doubtless.

Pensive and depressed, I went down the steps with my blank form, peering into the narrow streets. I was plunged almost instantly into a vice district where bargains were offered in the grossest and most pitiable terms. Oaths and chamber pots were discharged upon any who declined the syphilitic or



leprous embraces offered. I went into a bistro. Here everything could be bought: liqueurs, French pinard, preserves, cigarette lighters, military decorations, scents, letter paper, knives and all the bric-à-brac of Japanese and German export. Some tables in the low-vaulted room accommodated guests who were playing cards, drinking, or singing. Foreign Legionaires came here to get their heads broken in fights with other colonial troops. The man at the counter followed closely every movement of each of his clients. His rolled-up sleeves exposed hairy, tattooed arms. The waiters were a gigantic, moon-faced Senegalese and a haggard woman with dyed blonde hair.

As I sat in low spirits over a *café crème*, I was naturally attentive to the talk of a couple of members of the Foreign Legion who were arguing in a state of animation which I attributed to the empty bottles stacked under their chairs. One was Russian, the other German. Each spoke with a cultivated accent. Neither was above non-commissioned rank.

The Russian was tall and massive, with a face that must formerly have been handsome, but now was coarse and bloated. His companion, whom he called Eichenberg, had the keen profile of a Prussian officer. He was of medium height. His whole body and his every movement spoke of suppleness and strength. He had fine features. His high square forehead bore sabre scars. His hair was greyed at the temples, his nose aquiline, and his mouth sensitive. What was he doing in the uniform of the Legion?

Africa is full of mysteries, but anyone overhearing half-drunken conversations in a bistro is apt to pick up some clues. Accordingly, I learned that von Eichenberg had come to disgrace through cards. His ears were still ringing with the rebukes delivered to him by a judge of the Berlin criminal court, who had stressed the infamy brought on the von Eichenberg name. Nevertheless, Eichenberg dwelt wistfully on the hope of one day getting back for a Christmas in the Tirol—if the “new ideas” should prevail, if there should be a “complete social revolution” in Germany.

The other reproached him for being too “goddam serious”—“always reading and studying, taking up new ideas, new religions like that man’s—what’s his name?—that Hitler’s.” He insisted women and love-making were the cure for any trouble, and he ran on about how he himself had once been known in Rostov on the Don as “the handsome Sasha”, engaged to a rich man’s daughter, tipped for a brilliant career.



This was Eichenberg's chance to break in. He was getting a bit quarrelsome and hinted that he was tired of Baron Korff's narratives about his "lovely Olgas" and "Genias" and about the "cockroach races at Constantinople".

"All this talk of love—the grand passion. Come, Baron, you only make a travesty of love, combing the army brothels and even going to the native five-franc places. But, of course, you're practically rotting away with disease and haven't much to lose. Well, for my part, I can do without these backhouse pleasures and gymnastic exercises with dirty whores."

Baron Korff appeared unperturbed even when taxed with physical decay.

"Still faithful to your little Jewess?" he inquired, continuing with more good humour than tact. "By the way, did I tell you about what we did to the little Jewesses in that pogrom at Timoshevskoe—when, at the head of our gallant cavalry troops, commanded by General Pokrowski—"

"Did you ever tell me?" countered von Eichenberg with scorn. "Did you ever tell me anything else?"

"I can't figure you out, Eichenberg," said the Russian. "Pretending you're in love! This Sarah of yours—don't you know these girls are hot-blooded? What she needs is a good lay."

Sarah entered just at this juncture, enabling one to form an independent impression of what her needs might be. She was a slender girl of medium height, looking hardly older than eleven or twelve. As she drank with the Legionnaires, she hung about von Eichenberg's neck, toyed with his belt and helmet, laughed and bandied a few tender words with him in broken German.

"Ugh, you love birds!" exclaimed Baron Korff. "I tell you what you need is a good f—." In short, he stuck to his idea.

The talk then ran a good deal on odd sexual needs and disabilities. A story was told of an elderly colonel with a young wife courted by all the officers of the regiment—one young lieutenant, indeed, committed suicide on her account. The husband looked on, smiling and ironic, and the secret of his composure was that surgery had rendered the young woman incapable of sex relations. She had a "weak moment" and confessed to Baron Korff. What news that was to the Officers' Club! Then came the inevitable tale of the commandant who had incurred a certain mutilation at the hands of the Riffs—it showed the precision of the Riffs' German-made arms—and how his character was transformed so that now he was



fanatical about shutting down all the brothels. This brought up the case of a German, suffering from a head wound, who had queer sorts of orgies in Berlin, with platoons of women, oddly rigged with ostrich plumes, performing military manoeuvres, sometimes on all fours, while he shouted the orders and gloated over the scene with monocled eye.

By the time Eichenberg got to the colonel and the ostrich plumes, he was beginning to get drunk. He pounded with his fists, mingled French and German words, shouted that the table must be scrubbed.

"Damnation! A bit of Prussian order in this *bled*—that's what's needed! Damned Arab pigs! But just wait till the Germans get here. Then there'll be some order."

Fascinated, but a little appalled by a conversation so packed with stale memories, vain regrets, threadbare themes and anecdotes over-spiced to arouse coarsened senses, I joined the two men at their table. I might as well learn what I could of the life I was contemplating. The German was responsive to my evocations of Berlin, the Harz region, and the Thuringian forests. We got drunk together, and Eichenberg turned sentimental towards dawn, and vehement in his protests against my joining the Foreign Legion, promising to smash my face rather than see me committed to the life he knew. He contrived to tear up the printed forms I had with me from the commissariat. His sentiment wasn't all fireworks; for he gave me fifty francs before we separated.

Baron Korff had left earlier with an Arab woman. An Austrian, who had already taken the step I was contemplating, was spending in riot the money he had received from the recruiting officer.

A young soldier with a Corsican accent was imitating Maurice Chevalier. Another boasted he was the man to run through a whole brothel in one night. An Armenian and a Czech were getting a customs officer drunk. He roared, "Ah, no, fifteen hundred francs a month, it's a fine yearly income—" His helmet was pushed back, his moustache wet with wine, his khaki tunic unbuttoned.

Two Sengalese corporals drank coffee in silence. Defenders of a great nation and its colonial empire, they were proud of the Republic which allowed them to wear its uniform. Their dignified movements and rigid salute as white non-coms came in, indicated their respect for the dominant race. With fifty francs in my pocket and the warning of Eichenberg not to join, I walked back to my hotel and found, to my great relief,



a note from Mr. Diamantopoulos that a two-thousand-ton collier was leaving next day for the Cape of Good Hope, and I could get on as stoker. My mind was made up: I would not join the Legion.

The hours until dawn seemed long, but with the first rays of the sun I could perceive the outlines of a greyish hulk; the blue smokestack with the white cross painted on it. The SS *Andromaka* was getting ready to leave, and so was I.

## CHAPTER FORTY

INVIGORATING SALT AIR blowing through the rigging, a noble ship breasting the waves, tanned sailors with pipes in their mouths leaning over the rail and nonchalantly spitting—these had been my boyhood dreams of the sea. But in my worst nightmares I could never have imagined the old Greek tub on which I finally shipped out for the Eritrean coast. The air in the cargo compartments was unbreathable. Hordes of insects, from bedbugs the size of nickels to three-inch cockroaches, overran the region between the stokehole and the mess room where my hammock hung. The two-thousand-ton tramp was laden with livestock. Legs and hind quarters of animals—pigs, goats and steers—projected from every angle. The odour was stifling. Add to that the temperature of a Sahara. It was like a Turkish bath in a slaughter house. The vessel flew the Greek flag, and surely no other would have suited this floating necropolis.

The third day I came down with fever and stopped work. The captain, a muscular, savage-tempered hybrid, part Irish, part Syrian, summoned me to his cabin.

"Don't imagine, young man, that you're going to get out of work like that!" he shouted.

I was set to cleaning the cabin, washing the dishes and helping the half-mad Syrian cook. When the dishes were washed, he would soil them on purpose to make me wash them again.



Then I would kick him in the shins and he would begin howling like a wounded animal. The captain would burst into the galley, threatening to put me in irons for the rest of the trip. If any of the Arab crew protested at such treatment, he would kick them ferociously, drunkenly proclaiming that he was master of his ship. I felt a mad desire to break his jaw, but it was hardly worth the trouble, since I had decided to jump ship at the next port of call. I was saturated with the odour of livestock; the very soup tasted of pigs and goats.

The crew afforded some interest. The Arab who slept next me confided to me that he had killed his cousin over a money difficulty. He had a calm face, with great fanatical eyes and firm jaw. Dressed in a white suit and tie, he would draw from women the exclamation, "What a fascinating man!"

After six weeks, we entered the roadstead of a small port on the French Somali coast. A boat came out with a French customs official and some natives. It was gradually dawning. On the jetty were some colonial infantrymen, gesticulating in whirlwinds of dust. On the quay a row of skinny-legged blacks were waiting to unload the cargo. The jetty was perfectly straight. Near the customs house were three groups of squatting Negroes. There were some European-style buildings with blinds. There was the usual Place de Marseilles with arcades to keep off the murderous sun, some stores, a Paris bazaar, some mosques with white minarets. Merchandise was spread on the ground—earthen pots, bloody sheep's heads, some live goats. Children showed their white teeth and begged alms. Semites with finely cut, desiccated features. Immense flat-nosed Negroes. Whites in pith helmets. A few African sharpshooters, dressed in white, yawning lazily.

In this land of mud huts and barbarism, I hunted for work. Anything was better than to return to the two thousand tons of squealing creatures, my floating pigsty.

On Greek, French, and Portuguese ships I had spent months skirting the coast of the Black Continent. Now I would try to make my way back to some civilized centre, perhaps Alexandria. (At Johannesburg and the Cape Colony the English had sharply refused me permission to land.) I had had enough of the sun and fancied I had put all romantic inclinations behind me. I longed for a clean room, a book, or a game of chess with civilized persons. All that seemed so far away.

I picked my way through streets cluttered with sleepers to a two-story building occupied by a mining company. "General Salt Works" I read over the door in gilt letters. I accosted a



factory foreman in charge of black labourers; he was a Czech from Pilsen. He warned me the work was hard. Doubtless I looked like a tramp with my ragged clothes and burned skin. Even in this slave mill I drew questioning glances from the few whites seated at typewriters. The foreman's last words were, "If you have ability and stick it out, there will be advancement."

The salt works were long adjacent rectangles. The magnesia components were assembled in basins of porous earth. The Czech gave orders. The Negroes worked. Salt everywhere. A burning desert. In his tent the chief engineer drank whisky and gave orders to the Czech. Five hundred Negroes were engaged in the enterprise and ten whites of all nationalities. At night we went in a band to spend our earnings at the bar.

My chief recollection of this episode is of a spectacled German, a disciple of Nietzsche. He was determined to hew out a career here. He had a massive head and a square jaw. "You have only to will!" he kept saying. He had sought work for three years in his native Stuttgart after serving an apprenticeship in a Bible-printing establishment. People weren't reading Bibles much in his day. So he tramped his way down the Danube to the Balkans, to Egypt, and so here. He was already making a thousand francs a month and counting on more. Then he would bring his Gretchen from Stuttgart and they would found a German home and perhaps import a few things made in Germany. Then other Germans would come and they would organize a singing society.

"Poor Germany, ground down by the Treaty of Versailles!" he would say between two glasses of beer.

A week later I left the salt mine, the disciple of Nietzsche, and the Somali coast on a Greek freighter going to Alexandria.

Joining the Foreign Legion is traditionally the last resort of a desperate man. I had avoided that extremity. But my immediate miseries were not less acute than they would have been in the Legion. Working conditions on the Greek boats were wretched. We were fed any slop, paid a third of what American, Norwegian, or English boats paid. There were no unions. The captains, petty despots from the Ionian Islands, were absolute masters of their vessels, old hulks built in England thirty years earlier and needing to be repaired at every port of call. These shipmasters worked for wages no others would accept. They transported coal from Cardiff to Bari at half price, grinding their profit out of the sailors. Insurance companies would often refuse to insure ship or cargo. Lloyds of London was wary of



the Greek captains, who often scuttled their ships with all on board except their "compatriots", meaning those who came from the same village or even from the same island. The captains had a working agreement with all the Greek consulates, which supplied them with Negroes, derelicts, and desperadoes—men who were ready to work for a meal and two pounds a month and would stay in the stokehole in shifts of eight or ten hours, but who were apt to jump ship in American or Australian ports. The ships would lose half their crews even at places where there seemed not to be the least chance of eking out an existence.

At Marseilles maritime union representatives came aboard to organize the crew, but their words woke no gleam of understanding in the eyes of our rag-tag-and-bobtail outfits. They talked of better wages, less work, a better life, meat seven times a week. They told how on American ships ham and eggs and condensed milk were served for breakfast, and firemen were paid ten pounds a month. I joined the C.G.T.'s\* international seaman's branch at Marseilles, and secretly distributed the literature furnished me by persons who came on board at Oran, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Antwerp, Algiers, and Alexandria.

I often had to change ships at port; but life was the same on almost all the Greek boats. The *Chalkis*, the *Tessalonika*, the *Elefteros Venizelos*, the *Smyrniotis*, the *Agios Nicolaou*, and the *Janis* were all old hulks bought from the post-war overstock of merchant-marine ships. Twice we were on the point of mutiny because of the rotten fish that was served us and the beans that tasted like soap. Twice from French ports I shipped on vessels of the *Chargeurs Réunis* or of the intercoastal lines. The conditions and the life were better, but the companies were strict, and eventually foreigners were told, "Go and work on your own boats; we've enough French unemployed".

... I'd acquired a seaman's stagger. The salt air had browned my skin. My hands were hard, my forearms thick, and I had a useful fist for the recurrent brawls. Political organizations in the seaports sought to enlist me. Discussions often lasted far into the night and marine organizers instructed us how to distribute literature and organize strikes. At Rotterdam a huge Dutchman, big-boned and square-headed, got me to sign some papers. Over-night I became a political organizer on the *Janis*, a seven-thousand-ton steam collier.

The captain of the *Janis* wore spectacles and was held to

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\* Confédération Générale de Travail, the French T.U.C.



be the richest man on the island of Chios. His children had been educated in London. His daughter was to marry into the Emberikos clan of Greek navigation magnates. The skinny little man had his nose in everything and sniffed out my literature. He stamped his foot, a tiny foot in a custom-made shoe. He kept hounding me and muttering threats of jail. On several occasions he mentioned that his cousin was the chief of police of Piraeus and that he would be able to get me a good long sentence . . .

I must have cut an odd figure among all these sailors, seamen, and deck hands in striped jerseys with their swelling muscles and with bottles crammed in their pockets, for when they set out en masse for the brothels, I often went to visit museums, expositions, or even cemeteries. I indulged my interest in history, art, and cultural and social questions, which evoked the captain's suspicions. But meanwhile I found much to admire in the men who worked at my side. The *nissiotis* who come from the Ionian Islands and the Aegean Sea are of medium height, strong and big-boned. They are stubborn-willed and have hard, metallic-toned features, brown hair and sallow skins. They are grave and dignified, and though they have not the least education, and few can even read, they listened readily to serious political discussion. I enjoyed their slow, studied movements; they valued their bodies. The sea drew them persistently. Generation after generation they would leave their rocky isles. Sometimes the youngest brother stayed at home to wring harvests from their dry, sterile fields and look out for their women, who were regular-featured, a bit overweight, and apt to age earlier than they should, leading, as they did, a primitive and archaic existence. But always, even after years spent ~~abroad~~ <sup>abroad</sup>, these men returned to their native isles. Those isles, poor and rocky, flooded with a burning and pitiless sunlight, bind the hearts of the folk who have lived there for centuries. Slow beasts of burden, they work on where others would faint, winning their bread painfully on the land or the moribund coal freighters.

Port Said was intolerably hot. We had been waiting a week there for orders. The captain was furious. The first engineer was confined to his cabin by fever. But the ship's orders came at last. They were of a sort to rouse in me a confidence that this trip would be out of the ordinary. Word went round that we were going into the Black Sea to unload our cargo. Some said we were heading for Odessa; others, for Batum. The news



put me in a ferment. To set foot on Russian soil, perhaps stay there! I counted the days.

A still night; a light mist. We would have to wait till dawn to pass the Bosphorus. A patrol of quarantine officials came aboard and inspected the papers. We could hear them drinking and talking Turkish in the captain's cabin. From the deck came a murmur of sailors' voices. From forward I heard the call, "Two degrees".

The helmsman answered, "Clear!"

The shipboard lights faded out. Little Vassilakis went on chanting his monotonous "Aman . . . aman . . ." over and over again, a world of stifled pain in the utterance. Vassilakis was from Anatolia and could not erase from his mind what he had seen in the Smyrna disaster. He had often told me about the burning city, the massacre of his family; how his baby sister Marika had been burnt alive when the flames consumed his father's store, the shop with the crates of figs so neatly piled in front of the door; how Kemal Pasha's soldiers the next day had finished off with the bayonet what the flames had left. . . .

And so little Vassilakis could not suppress the "Aman . . . aman"—the endless, age-old Near East lament. A friendly, scrawny little man in slippers and a dirty jumper, a Byzantine cross hanging from his thin neck, a pious expression on his coal-blackened face.

I groped in the dark for my jacket.

The breeze was rising. The machinery was silent. In the distance were the lights of Istanbul, grandiose and fantastic. Moonlight shed over all a pale bluish radiance.

The telegrapher's cabin was still lighted.

"Five degrees left!"—the captain's voice.

"Five degrees left," came the perfunctory echo.

The engines started up again. The water was glassy. The rocky shores of the Golden Horn, Scutari, Galata, and Pera loomed silvery in the moonlight along all that shore. Now the lights of Istanbul grew clearer. The dome of St. Sophia rose above the illumined lacework, and the minarets, the gardens of Scutari, the Turkish shore emerging plainer and plainer.

We passed some sailing craft with red bat-like wings. The Sultan's white marble palaces with their fairytale outlines were mirrored in the strait. The stars hung low and enormous. I made out the cypresses bending towards the water. The breeze brought the scent of land, then it faded as the gardens and the palaces fell away.



"Aman, aman," I heard at my elbow.

I turned to the small wrinkled face of Vassilakis beside me in the twilight. Tears welled from his eyes and coursed down his seamy cheeks, leaving whitened paths in the coal-dusted skin.

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

TO SEE THE REST of the crew go ashore at Novorossisk was the cruellest of torments. The long-coated, serious-faced Soviet soldiers had come aboard in their pointed, red-starred helmets and examined the papers in the captain's cabin. Later I watched the red-flagged motor launch take them off again, heard the motor chug, saw their uniformed figures dwindle. Their instructions were that all might go ashore—except those born in Russia. That meant Luka and me. The rest were free to trade their contraband soap, scent, and silk stockings, and try their luck with the girls they would meet at the International Seamen's Club. It was as though one had travelled far to some shrine, to discover that the holy relics were being exhibited only to the profane but denied to those born and bred in the faith.

Like the patriarch Moses, I was permitted only to gaze on the Promised Land, where I might not enter.

"Well, brother, best forget about it," counselled Luka.

I could not have been more fortunate than I was in this companion in exclusion. It was a time for summing up and taking stock of experiences which had been too varied and interrupted to be easily co-ordinated.

The one thread that ran through the whole patchwork of my life, giving it meaning and connection, was the fact that I was a Russian. It was bound to be a great moment when, after so many years, I saw Russian soil again. My recollections of Russia were the most vivid, most moving, most formative of any that I had acquired. In every place of my exile, Russia had excited the liveliest emotion. It was often hostile emotion;



and if my Russian birth had never ceased to be a subject of pride, it also had never ceased to bring me trouble and prevent my taking root elsewhere. There had been, furthermore, the conflict between the tradition of my class and the social consciousness, acquired by force of circumstances, which led me to view the USSR with warm sympathy. Yes, there was much to be thought and felt.

And Luka, my companion, was himself a Russian and therefore something of a philosopher. He was heavy-set and muscular, with a huge shaven head and a massive nose. A Greco-Russian of about forty, he came from Kherson on the Black Sea. In the first World War he had served on the torpedo boat *Intrepid*. His swelling forearms were tattooed with hearts, women, Chinese dragons, a Greek Orthodox cross, a man lifting weights, a girl's name.

"Well, brother, best forget about it."

It was touching to hear Luka speak in a tone so restrained, so charged with feeling.

"It's not for us," he repeated. "We've been torn up by the roots. We'll never get planted again."

His face radiated simple honesty, the drawn features and gentle voice in odd contrast with his powerful physique. For some time he had been complaining of eye-strain. He would shade his eyes with his hairy hand in order to identify for me landmarks on the shores of his native Black Sea.

He, too, had reason to feel strongly about this region. Generations of his family had served in the Russian navy and it had all ended in Luka's witnessing the tragic destruction of the dreadnoughts *Volya* and *Svobodnaya Rossia* in this very roadstead. At first the seamen thought they were betrayed, but the Commissar from Moscow had explained the German ultimatum and told them that the ships must be sacrificed to secure peace and thus save the proletarian revolution. Luka's eyes filled with tears as though he were seeing the scuttling again, and, recalling how the vessels had subsided beneath the surface, he seemed to be parting once more with his homeland. He had emigrated. For a time he had lived a pastoral life on the island of Naxos while his wounds healed. How his mental readjustment had been effected, he would never explain. But he returned to the sea.

We endlessly discussed such large subjects as love, faith in human ideals, death, reincarnation, good and evil, and virtue. The true love, Luka said, was not the egotistical sentiment one nourished for a few chosen ones, but an all-embracing



instinctive tenderness, an indestructible faith in the human ideal.

It was one of Luka's firm beliefs that "new" peoples, like the Russians in the East and the Americans in the West, were people of destiny. Western Europe, he held, was senile and decadent, cankered with small perfidies, trickery, legalistic chicanery. I could understand what he meant when he talked of the dry rot undermining the social centres of the West, working in senate chambers, embassies, schools and throughout that labyrinth of endless imposture called the League of Nations. As a Christian humanist, Luka subscribed to the Soviet doctrines. But the new gospel, he insisted, would have to develop a different form in every nation, just as the growth of a plant varies with soil and climate.

Side by side, at Novorossisk, we leaned on the rail, watched the diminutive forms moving to and fro on the shore, and debated such subtleties. Luka spoke of the self-sacrifice, solidarity and unshakable will of the younger Russians, and of how they had cheerfully endured every hardship of civil war, famine and ostracism from the world, so that Russia might come to stand materially abreast of the times and thus be able to retain the moral leadership she had grasped in the Revolution.

He could not understand how this effort could fail to command respect. Thus as an emigré he had avoided his former fellow officers, feeling that they were blind in their hopes for a different Russia. He had been expelled from the Association of Former Officers of the Black Sea Fleet on account of his ideas.

At Piraeus, one day, a Soviet ship had been unloading sacks of flour. When the crew came ashore, members of a White Russian organization, the "Cossack Club", attacked them with bottles—they had been drinking vodka all night to screw up their courage.

Luka intervened. With his burly fist he knocked down, one after another, those ex-Cossack officers of whom too many had become hoodlums and guides to brothels.

He spoke with enthusiasm of the treatment of minorities in Russia. He himself was half-Greek and had been followed by the epithet "*pintos*" as far back as the period of his service in the Tsar's fleet. On the other hand, Luka, as an individualist, did not approve of the collectivization of the land. The collective farms, he said—and there were many who agreed with him in this year of 1930—were "contrary to the instincts of the Russian peasant". He considered that nationalist sentiment



and militarism were inseparable, and therefore could not reconcile the idea of Russian nationalism with the Soviet Union's outspoken criticism of the military sentiment of nations beyond her frontiers. The union of humanity, he felt, should be no more than a loosely articulated federation of nations in which each citizen would be allowed the greatest freedom within the framework of a common discipline. Much Communist propaganda seemed sectarian to him and therefore unrealistic, since the times called for the utmost unity of all liberal elements against the rising reaction.

In Europe, Luka thought capitalism was in the final stages of decay. Even in America there was depression. The European proletariat would have to unite on the basis of revolutionary aims or face enslavement by fascism. If only they would do so quickly, before capitalist economics turned to the munitions-makers for a solution of their problems of production and distribution! Only the revolution could create a peaceful economy. What, then, was holding back the revolution?

"It's a question of forces," Luka insisted. "Look at the French, Victor. Absolute degenerates. But our youth?" He pointed to the figures we could see in the harbour of Novorossisk. "To-morrow and the future are theirs."

I shook my head. "You're a funny fellow, Luka. Here you are talking about equal rights for peoples, and the solution of the national question in Russia, and you come up with some absurd mystical notion of 'new peoples', 'decadent nations!' Next thing you know, you'll be talking about the 'Russification of Europe' just as if you were still sailing for the Tsar!"

But I could never shake Luka's passionate conviction that all countries and peoples were inferior to our own. A pacifist at heart, and an idealist tinctured with religion, Luka dreamed of a miracle, the birth of a new Russian, perhaps Pan-European, Christianity, in which all nations' problems would be solved by the paternal benevolence of the Russian people.

The sailors got back late that night. Panajataki, the oiler, stank of alcohol. He'd been able to find some young women "with hats", who succumbed to the lure of his soap and silk hose. He recounted his adventures, a smile playing over his stupid, pop-eyed face. Antonis, the fireman, on the other hand, had spent his time with several others at the Sailors' International Club, and talked of the Red Corner there, with its library and reading room, of the chess tournament, the balalaika orchestra and chorus. What a contrast between this



sailors' club and the cheap diversions afforded by the bars and brothels of Oran and Marseilles!

The contrast between Panajataki and Antonis set Luka off on some wild generalizations on race and the Slavic character. He claimed that one could not be even one-quarter Slav without participating in the superior Slavic insight. I contended that conditioning mattered much more than blood. Luka readily acceded to this view; or rather, he eagerly appropriated it and it fired him to an utterance which struck me as original at the time, and which I have later had cause to remember.

"Anyway," he said, "the Russians of our time, whether revolutionists or not, whether Bolsheviks or the reverse, are not distinguishable from the rest of the world by the shape of their heads or the formation of their jaws or by their noses or their eyes. No. All these people, in Russia or in exile, in Moscow or in Paris, at Harbin or at Casablanca—they are all Russians in the sense that all are inescapably part of the potent Russian ambient.

"At bottom we are all of the same mind, are we not? Those who have lived in the Slav background and who, in adult life, were familiar with our habit of mind, however injudicious, and our modes of action, however exaggerated, cling to them. In New York, you know, I have seen old Jews in *caftans*, whose experience of Russia was all bad, packing theatre auditoriums where a Russian film was being shown or a Russian play being acted. The land has an iron grip. Believe me, if there should be a war and intervention against Soviet Russia, the young Russian emigrés, even though Russia keeps them in exile, will rise as one man to defend her!

"Take you, for instance—you are working here as a Greek seaman, without even the right to stick your nose into Russian territory. You've had plenty of time to acquire the Western mentality, the French or German state of mind. You've been to Western schools and colleges and shared in Western life. But you can't get round the circumstance that for eight or ten years you were a small boy in Russia, breathing the same dust as the rest, the dust of our roads, our steppes, and the air of our forests. War, famine, wretchedness, sickness and danger have only confirmed you in your Russian Christianity, a bit histrionic and exhibitionistic. We must not lose sight of the Oriental strain in us, and there you are, my dear fellow, someone right from the pages of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and Kuprin, and all the Russian poets and novelists, the Titans of our



remarkable literature. All you had to do was to smell for a few years the black, redolent earth, and behold! you will never shake it off. You'll go on beating your chest and shouting, 'I'm a worthless sinner', while looking everywhere for 'justice'. You'll hunt out souls in street-corner prostitutes and ascribe 'character' to the beggars you meet. And then, there's your Russian conscience, which will make you a peck of trouble. No, no, don't interrupt. You're the prototype of thousands of other young Russians at home and abroad. We're all in the same boat. It is an historic truth—our dramatic, exuberant Christianity.

"And don't run away with the thought that environment will much alter you. Go to Paris, Montevideo, or Buenos Aires and experience there the happiest moments of your life; all at once you'll be clutching your head in your hands and, after thumping your chest for a while, you'll chase off to the nearest consulate and beg to be repatriated. Nothing will stop you."

Luka had definitely caught certain traits of mine!

Actually, his honest eyes were fixed on remoter perspectives, as though he had painted the likeness not just of the one sitter at hand, but of a great multitude, all marked with the stamp of indestructible Russian-ness, waiting, as it were, for the moment to manifest their ineradicable loyalty. And it has seemed to me since that Luka's vision, as we leaned on the rail of that ship gazing towards forbidden Novorossisk, was a vision to rival those of the dying patriarch Moses on his eminence on Mount Nebo in the land of Moab.







## PART SIX

# A POLITICAL CAREER IN GREECE

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### CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

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THE *Janis*, when I shipped, was not to stop at Greek ports; consequently I seemed safe from the dangers the captain was threatening. We were two days out from the Golden Horn when the news came like a thunderclap that, upon orders from the company at Liverpool, we were to touch at Piraeus instead of at Alexandria. My fellow sailor, Michalakis, looked very disturbed when he gave me this report. He was active with me as an agitator. I knew trouble was in store for me on Greek soil. The well-to-do captain detested me; by pandering to his dislike, his cousin, the police commissioner, would have a chance to consolidate his standing in the eyes of a rich relative.

It was a week before the Greek Orthodox Easter. For the fast they were giving us dried octopus morning and night. The captain was pious, and besides, dried octopus was cheap. The bread was too wormy and mouldy to eat and our stomachs were hollow. I had drafted a petition signed by the entire crew. They were ready to mutiny with the exception of a handful that came from the captain's own village and had families living there. There was no question that I was a ringleader; and, as we skirted the Peloponnesian coast, I was uncomfortably aware that each day brought me nearer my reckoning.

At Piraeus men in white costumes with silk shirts and straw hats came on board. They gesticulated lavishly and then disappeared on the bridge with the captain. I expected the worst. The crew lined up on deck and opened their mouths for the medical inspection. As a straw-hatted official passed me he shook his head, looked at a document, and gave some orders. Two sailors, in uniforms resembling those of the British navy and with the port authority band on their sleeves, told



me to come ashore with them. Two others secured Michalakis's elbows. A motor launch with a blue flag and cross took us off. Venizelos's government would soon have a chance to interrogate its subjects.

At the *Limenarchia*, or Port Authority Building, where I was taken into custody, Easter celebrations were in full swing. My two guards were extremely religious and were already quite drunk by the time the motor launch anchored. They considered it their Christian duty to let me take part in the celebration. I spent the night with my escorts under a solemn promise not to do anything which might jeopardize their 1850-drachmas-a-month positions.

I waked and flung off the covers and ran to the window. The sun was high, the day warm and cloudless, and a light breeze blew in from the sea. There were several ships besides the *Janis* in port: the oil-stained water mirrored sailing craft and rowboats. The roadstead was sheltered by a jetty on which a few ragged loafers were sunning themselves. The *Limenarchia*, where I had spent the night, was near the wharves. The streets of Piraeus were slowly filling. An early tram rattled along the waterfront. Two men in white clothes were gesturing broadly. A money-changer was tidying his small table. People gathered before the little shops. A lame peddler was shouting his wares: candied nuts, green lemonade in small bottles. Bells rang at a nearby church: I caught the oppressive odour of incense. It was Orthodox Easter—April, 1930. My head was still buzzing with recollections of the last night's procession, the Orthodox popes bearing crosses, the crowds singing hymns, the smell of broiled fish, mutton and lamb being spitted at little grills, mingled with clouds of incense. I could still hear the unctuous cries of "Christos anesti! Christ is risen!"

At the church there had been black-clad women praying fervently, each begging special favours and privileges from the thousand saints of the Orthodox calendar. The men's choir had sung well. After the service my escorts had exchanged embraces all around, including me. "*Adelfake*—brother," they kept repeating with shining faces. We went into one of the numberless taverns. There, on red check tablecloths, bottles of resin wine, *mavrodaphni*, and *samiotiko* awaited the devout. A curly-haired waiter in a soiled shirt rushed from one table to another with roast lamb and sides of mutton. Our fingers dripped with fat. Guitars had been produced and there were melting songs. After some glasses of wine, my escorts were completely intoxicated. Towards morning I had to take *them*



home. They staggered and kept clapping me on the back and calling me their little brother. What a celebration! What an Easter!

Now the café opposite the *Limenarchia* was filling rapidly. Numerous papers appeared on the little round tables. Big headlines in yellow and green said, "*Christos anesti*". "*Christos anesti*," shouted the ragged street urchins. Even the sea breeze seemed to be murmuring: Christ is risen . . . Easter in Greece is unique. Even the customs officers and naval garrison of the seaport had taken special pains with their uniforms and were looking trim and festive.

But, after all, I was under detention. Eventually, a port police sergeant, smelling strongly of wine and garlic, came into my white-washed room. He took me to be questioned by the captain, a little bearded man in white uniform with epaulettes, named Papatheodoros. Pawing my papers with his short, hairy hands, he questioned me deliberately until noon. Then a fellow brought in some black coffee and cigarettes. Someone wandered in and began waving his hands about. No formalities were observed. He seized the captain by the coat and talked right into his face. The words "*gamoti banaia*" figured in every sentence.

Other men drifted in, lifting their straw hats to dry their foreheads with red handkerchiefs. Endless black coffees were fetched. Then four sailors brought in a pale wretch with sunken cheeks, a deserter from the army, who had been found in the company of a woman and smoking hashish. He wept and begged for the love of Christ to be let go. In the midst of his entreaties, a fat woman dressed in black entered carrying a sack; in it was a fish. Everyone forgot the deserter while Papatheodoros examined the fish with the air of an epicure, poking it suspiciously. At last the wrinkles that marred his brow smoothed out, his face took on a contented expression and he dealt gently with the deserter. Papatheodoros was thinking of his supper.

The day dragged on. Morphine addicts, Communists, soldiers A.W.O.L. and stick-up men were brought in and put behind bars. My escorts took me to the movies. We saw a cowboy film. The audience applauded and hissed enthusiastically to suit the action. Everyone made himself at home, spitting on the floor, smoking, and talking to the row behind or in front. My guards were as happy as children.

It was the same business the next day, only this time I was taken before a marine-court magistrate. When the captain



brought me in, the magistrate was occupied arranging his library on the shelves. He was a dried-up sixty. The books were French and German, a Code Napoléon side by side with a Meyer's lexicon. The room was furnished with two chairs and a divan and crowded with more straw-hatted men, who all questioned me at once, making broad gestures. The sexagenarian demanded silence. The man who had brought me from the boat signed some papers. The door was guarded by a sailor with a fixed bayonet. Ultimately I was accused of making Communist propaganda among the crew of the *Janis* and specifically of having tried to organize the crew to demand higher wages and better fare. I tried to answer and to explain. The magistrate pounded the table with his bony fist, accompanying his words with such a salivary spray that I had to fall back three yards as he advanced.

The actual cross-questioning began upon the arrival of an interpreter.

"Communist?"

"No."

"Inciting to mutiny?"

"No."

"Talking against the church?"

"No."

"How do you come to have Greek papers?"

I furnished the explanation.

"Anarchist?"

"No."

"Never belonged to any anarchist-syndicalist groups?"

"No."

"In the narcotic traffic?"

"No."

"Morphine?"

"No."

"Cocaine-addict?"

"No."

"What religion?"

"Greek Orthodox."

"Go to church?"

"No."

"Aha!"

I retreated another yard, fearing the saliva would start spraying again, but someone came in with coffee and this quieted my interrogator. A man took my passport over to the light, studied the photograph and the stampings, and then

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telephoned to police headquarters at Athens. After a dreary wait, he was told that my papers were entirely in order. Still the judge was not placated.

"We know you, you Russians, always making trouble!" he exclaimed.

I was taken upstairs. In the late afternoon my guards, who had still not sobered up from Holy Easter, whispered that I was to be sent to the commandery at Athens and given over to the military authorities. It had been decided that I belonged in class X, and, according to law, must enrol immediately for fourteen months' military service in the Greek army. That same day I was put on the electric train for Athens.

My hand rose to my cap in a careless sort of salute as I presented myself at the commandery before a commission of three officers in khaki with stiff hats, their elbows firmly planted on a table. The colonel had five ribbons on his hat and above them a little blue insigne with a white cross. They questioned me in bad French and I answered in bad Greek. At last I signed something or other, the effect of which was that I was assigned to an Infantry Regiment.

I began at once to lead the life of a barracks occupant in a rectangular white-washed building with iron beds, overlooking the equestrian statue of Colocotroni in the middle of Athens. Here at the *Phrourarchion*—the Athens Military Commandery—they gathered in all the riffraff of the city and of the port: invalids, chronic hashish addicts, mental cases, card sharpers, deserters and political prisoners. All were tumbled together into a long room. They lay on the floor. Heavy iron grillework separated them from our quarters. They sat behind the bars and begged with outstretched hands for cigarettes or a drachma. The air was so foul that I made a detour to avoid the grille.

Three times a day I stood in line with my basin to get tea and bean soup, looking as pitiably ill-dressed as the rest of the khaki-clad soldiers in shabby cloth caps and leggings. Every day the military police brought in groups of peasants who had failed to answer the call to military service. Little bearded fellows in thick shirts and cotton trousers. They were taken before the three officers and reprimanded; and a few hours later, their heads shaved and under their arms great round loaves of black bread, they would be walking in twos and threes to the court, wearing uniforms that sagged on their misshapen frames, and waiting to be sent to their regiments.

When some tall, rugged mountaineer was brought in by



the regional special police, usually in chains, he would be assigned to the *evzones* or selected for the republican guard. The mountain men were peasants from Boeotia and Peloponnesus. The greater number were unable to sign their names. Many wept and knelt before the recruiting officers.

"*Adelphe Christe mou*," they would sob. "What will become of my family, my grape harvest, my mule?"

Often a priest was brought in to speak to them authoritatively; he would lift his eyes to heaven and it seemed to have a calming effect. But by evening they would be wailing their eternal "aman-aman".

I lay on my iron bed awaiting orders and, possessed by a complete indifference, began smoking hashish, which could be obtained secretly rolled in cigarettes, eating afterwards a bit of *halrah* or *baclara* to kill the taste. Fourteen months knocked out of my life when I had my way to make! I felt cheated. A Jewish non-com from Salonika slipped me a copy of *l'Humanité*. I took it to the latrine where one might read in peace. The news from Germany was alarming. Perched precariously on a squarish bit of plank above the latrine trench, I gripped the paper in one hand and an iron bar with the other. From this eminence I got an interesting view of the noble outlines of the Acropolis.

After being assigned to a Machine Gun Company, I moved to barracks at the end of the Boulevard Ambelokipos. Though white-washed, they teemed with vermin. Fifty of us were put in one huge room next to another rectangular building that accommodated the mules. The Company was made up chiefly of peasants from the environs of Athens, mostly Royalist sympathizers. The officers, all three from Crete, were Venizelists. The mules came from Macedonia and appeared to be without political opinions. The heat was stifling; a great red sun grilled the barracks from five in the morning till six at night. As far as the eye could see there was not a tree or a scrap of green herbage.

Each soldier was costing Elefteros Venizelos's government fifteen drachmas a day—fifteen cents, U.S. currency. We didn't steal the money. We had to work hard, drill continually, make roads, and serve as cheap conscript labour. With an outmoded Austrian Mannlicher rifle and ammunition on our backs weighing some fifty pounds, and with a laden mule travelling ahead, we marched and marched till our feet were raw and bleeding. In that little army, as in the Foreign Legion, the word was "March or starve!"



The daily fare was olives, black bread and watery soup. The soldiers were wiry, with great nervous energy and stamina, an army of hardy peasants, rolling on half-empty stomachs. Later years were to demonstrate their power to march for days on virtually nothing as they sang their melancholy songs. It was a highly mobile force since its members could carry a week's provisions—a bit of goat cheese, a crust of black bread and some olives—in their trousers pockets. The officers were equally simple. They went afoot beside their columns, shouting "One, two, one, two", wiping the sweat from their brows with red check kerchiefs.

At the end of three months I knew how to assemble a Hotchkiss machine gun in a few minutes. One time a number of French officers turned up and made an inspection and we presented arms. The whole drill was French in method, conducted by a sergeant major who was scarcely five feet tall and weighed about eighteen stone, but was remarkably nimble for his weight. He seemed able to anticipate all the tricks and evasions of his compatriots; his little black eyes took in everything. He meted out severe penalties, never less than two days of solitary confinement. In the hottest weather he would stay tightly buttoned up, sweat streaming from his shaven head.

The captain of the Company, Janoulakis, was sober and sad in his bearing. His face was bony and garnished with a little drooping moustache. He took the morning roll call and was seen thereafter only at machine gun drills.

"Two hundred paces, Frenchy. Don't you understand the language yet?" he would say to me.

He was all for the military career, an admirer of the Prussian system. He had been in two Balkan wars and in the catastrophic retreat from Asia Minor.

The lieutenant, Georgiades, came from the military academy. He had a typical Athenian profile, but blue eyes, which were a rarity, and blond hair. He was originally from Crete, but had Germanic blood. The little curly-haired enlisted men were foul-mouthed, had lice in their eyebrows, and stank. They were illiterate, garrulous, and as curious and obstinate as children. They would turn out en masse for performances of the Caragiosi, a childish Greco-Turkish puppet show.

Behind the barracks stretched little wooden houses occupied by refugees from Asia Minor. There the soldiers swapped bread for cigarettes or coffee or a woman, which on the average cost three rounds of black bread.



The mule inspections were severe. These creatures are the heart and soul of the Greek army, for the machine gun regiments in which they serve are Hellas's first line of defence. In Thrace, Pyrgos and Macedonia, mules are the sole means of transport. We had to curry these animals, clean them between the legs, wash them with hot water and clean out their manure six times a day. The obstinate creatures exacted individual treatment: we kept pieces of carrot continually in our pockets to bait them forward. One obstinate animal could arrest a whole train on the narrow mountain paths. Then the sergeant would dash from one beast to another, coaxing and beating and calling on all the saints of the Greek calendar. Manoeuvres could be particularly disagreeable for anyone like myself, unfamiliar with a mule's psychic reactions.

"Company forward, in the name of St. Anthony!" screamed the sergeant.

My mule did not budge.

The fat, angry little non-com ran closer and threatened, "Two days of prison!"

Still the creature stood fast.

"Three days of prison!"

The mule nickered, raising its head and showing its big teeth.

The sun was a red-hot pitiless ball. We had been marching hours with no water and no rest. I tugged at the mule's bridle while three others pushed. Nothing would budge the beast.

Finally the captain approached. "Frenchy—you Europeans just don't understand mules!" He whispered something in the animal's ear, and magically, without a second's delay, she stepped off. I was overwhelmed by so much understanding between beasts and men. . . .

We marched. Captain Janoulakis walked on beside me with his habitual sour expression, but showing no fatigue. He questioned me about France, Italy and Germany.

"We Greeks are a backward people," he observed. "Our politicians are rascals. Take Colonel Tsamis, for instance. He has just signed a contract with the millionaire building contractor, Nicolaides; and as a result the Third and Fifth Infantry are going to build a road to the new gambling casino at Loutraki. Nicolaides would have to pay labourers fifty drachmas a day, but soldiers"—he made one of those gestures with his palm and index finger so common in the Balkans and Orient—"he gets them for nothing. Connections, you see!



Colonel Tsamis is a Royalist, God punish him! As for me, I've held the same rank for fifteen years and drawn 4000 drachmas a month—for a family of six."

He plodded on, his moustache drooping. I nibbled a bit of cheese. Janoulakis reached for his flask and began talking about the Greco-Turkish War of 1897.

"One day a detachment of prisoners was to arrive from Janina at the Larissa garrison. I was then a young lieutenant in the Second Army Corps, and my wife Kaliopi had just brought me her dowry of three thousand good gold drachmas. We had built a house at Kalamata. But to get back to the prisoners. One morning the sergeant major presented himself. He was a grim man, a mountaineer from Castoria. He had brought in ten Turkish prisoners in such a state that the wretches could scarcely walk, I was suspicious because the captives were so few.

" 'Koumbare,'\* I said, 'where is the report of the Commandant at Janina?'

"He handed me a piece of paper in the handwriting of the priest of the regiment, giving the number of prisoners.

" 'Koumbare,' I observed, 'the figures here have been altered. One cypher is missing.' He shook his head and waved a hand towards the Turks.

" 'That's the lot,' he said.

"Next day I received a report from headquarters that the detachment had consisted of a hundred prisoners. When I questioned him the sergeant major crossed himself.

" 'Infidels!' he said, his eyes shining savagely. 'Accursed infidels!'

"One by one they had been wiped out as he had rubbed out the cypher. What a time! In those days the mountain folk were still savages. I often wonder how far they have come since."

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\* Free translation: "Friend".



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*CHAPTER FORTY-THREE*

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BARRACKS LIFE meant being deprived of newspapers and books. I had long since sold my wrist watch and now had no money. Every day I exchanged my bread ration for a packet of cigarettes. I was handicapped because I spoke the language badly. The whole set-up was unfamiliar, Asiatic, including habits and manners. The soldiers were repellent, spat everywhere, and broke wind at night in an atrocious way.

They stole everything; one day my rifle vanished, another day my bed cover. I recovered my boots from a clothier in the refugee section behind the barracks. Once even my cartridges were stolen. Venereal infections were not treated regularly. One day we were taken to the hospital for Wassermann tests. Of the hundred and forty soldiers in the company nineteen showed a positive reaction. When they were told what it meant to have a positive reaction followed by three crosses, two of them shot themselves. The rest submitted to treatment, save for one who refused and began to treat himself with herb tea sent from his village.

One was struck by the traces remaining here of Asiatic and Turkish invasion. The masses were a hundred years behind European civilization. My fellow soldiers came mostly from impoverished southern hamlets, arid deserts where, except for a few grapevines, there were only quarries and scorching red rock to be found. The sun withered everything. The northern peasants, however, those from Macedonia, were taller, stronger and better educated. Nature had been less harsh to them, the rains were more frequent; they had scattered stretches of green pasturage and a few lean cows along with their sheep and goats. But even these peasants were so poor they were abjectly grateful for fried fish and a bit of meat on Sundays. They would take off their caps, cross themselves, and thank God. Piety was universal.

The Commandant called to me one day when I entered his headquarters. Picking his nose absorbedly, he did not

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stop on my account. On the table he had some wooden counters and was counting aloud:

"Two plus thirty-one, minus—ah, Frenchy, it's you."

I saluted. He had before him my military dossier with a report of the port police chief on my activities in the merchant marine. He got red in the face all at once and began bellowing:

"Another Red. *Gamoti Stanios*. I'll cure you of these tricks! Just try propaganda here. You'll be court-martialled and sent to ten years' forced labour at the islands." He panted and beat the table with his fist. Little pockets of fat jiggled under his reddish, lashless eyes. "And so you refused to go to Sunday Mass! I'll teach you some respect for Holy Church and the Venizelos government, all you lousy Communists, cocainists and anarchists. You're not a Turk, are you? Or a Bulgar, hey? Son of a bitch!"

The Commandant was completely illiterate and one could not argue with him. I let him bellow. When he sat down again I expected to be given ten days' confinement. Instead he told me he was going to make a report to the Minister of War, asking that I be sent to the frontier and put in a special battalion for hardened cases. And, if that didn't work, he would recommend special servitude in the islands. This latter was the equivalent of the death sentence. Meanwhile—confinement to quarters for a week, daily kitchen police, and twenty-four hours in solitary on bread and water.

I made up my mind to get away. After five months at this barracks I was completely fed up; I could not stay nine more. I began to evolve plans for an escape, intending to hide out at Piraeus until I could stow away on some outbound foreign vessel. Accordingly, the next Sunday, when my confinement was up, I swapped my uniform for a 50-drachma note and a shabby outfit of clothes, and disappeared into the crowd of church-goers. Later I bought some brushes, black and tan shoe polish, and a little box of bronze shoe pegs. Until my boat came I would be a member of the free, if already overcrowded, profession of street-corner bootblack.

I had been for two months at large in Kokkinia, the pestilential refugee quarter of Piraeus. When it rained, rivers coursed through the streets, bearing red clay, broken-down furniture, and even some of the shacks or outhouses in which large families sheltered. Bright days brought choking dust. I was hiding out in a hovel close to the "Vourla", inter-



nationally famous as the largest brothel on the Mediterranean.

The inmates were from sixteen to sixty, refugees from Smyrna and Asia Minor, destitute women picked up in the streets of Athens, women without families, without names, often half-blind, crippled, paralytic or tuberculous. Greeks, Armenians and Turks, they strolled lazily through the courts between the buildings and visited here and there. Or on cold days they spread their legs and warmed their backsides over little charcoal stoves. A hospital and a chapel reared up above the quarters of the women.

A few steps away from the "Vourla" life went on as usual. Merchants offered their wares, children played in the mud and rubbish. Men lay snoring on the ground in the dusty shop-lined streets. Crooked, narrow alleys led down to the docks, where, keeping an eye open for the police, I went every day in the hope of getting on some ship, watching the arrivals and sailings eagerly and studying the flags of all nations, but the straw-hatted gentry were guarding the docks day and night.

My landlady, Marika, must once have been beautiful. Now, at barely forty, she was wrinkled and grey-haired. Long black dresses concealed her over-thick legs. Women aged early here. I often saw her leaning her elbows on the table in her tiny two-room lodging, reflecting upon her wretched circumstances. Some shabby ikons hung on the walls and a candle was burning under a postcard reproduction of the Virgin of the Rocks—a cheap lithograph made at Leipzig.

Marika had plenty to worry about. Her daughter was already eighteen and not married. The latter was a pale girl with eruptions round her mouth. She worked at Papastratos' cigarette factory in Piraeus and earned twenty drachmas for a gruelling twelve-hour day. Then Marika brooded on the girl's not having any dowry. The father, a stoker, had been lost at sea. The company had refused on some pretext to pay the full insurance. Marika had been given only a couple of thousand drachmas instead of the twenty thousand due. A local priest, Father Theodore, had been called upon to settle the dispute. He assured Marika that the money would be made up to her in the next world. In an effort to secure her admission to this blessed abode, Marika spent hours in the Father's church—while her two children played outside in the muck, their bare bellies showing through their ragged shirts. In addition, Marika's fifteen-year-old son, a messenger boy, had been locked up some months ago for stealing postage stamps from letters he was sent to post. Now he was running



wild with other scamps his age. If the daughter should lose her job—and she was so frail——!

But above all others, one nightmare image never quitted Marika's imagination; the vision of the square buildings, the hospital and the chapel of the "Vourla" . . .

The situation of all the inhabitants of Kokkinia was as confusing as it was hideous. But I gradually gained some insight into their problems. Greece's public debt was assuming crushing proportions. The millions that were borrowed went largely to grease the political machine that kept Venizelos in power; credits fell into the hands of thieving bankers, who salted down their stolen wealth in Paris or London banks. Public works and the crying demands of public hygiene were neglected and the government's expenditure failed to afford any relief to the unemployed. Meanwhile, parliamentary majorities were secured by electoral jobbery. The votes of the repatriated refugees\* from Asia Minor were at Venizelos's disposal, since he had obtained their expatriation from Turkey. His government conceded them the right to exist and vote, but did very little to improve their lot. All this one might glean from the papers and from common talk.

Yet the public was averse to the immediate and bold remedies that appeared necessary. Rather than take action, it preferred to let dishonest politicians go on "balancing" the budget. Money never reached the needy. Wages were absurdly low and hours of work far too long. Tubercular children were forced to work in unhealthy factories to supplement their parents' insufficient income. The exploitation of human misery was unchecked. The contrast between rich and poor was sensational for a nation of petty artisans. Greece was another Balkan country where democracy was only a word misused by corrupt politicians.

The Church was to a great extent responsible for the sordid conditions in the Balkans. Fanatical and archaic and entirely subservient, until the most recent period, to reaction, it obstructed any sort of advance whether hygienic or social. One might have thought that the Church would lead in a moral regeneration. But at this time the black-hooded Fathers with big crosses over their plump bellies seemed bent only on wringing a harvest of wealth from the slums. Attended by shaven-headed boys bearing incense, the priests directed their steps to the wretchedest hovels. They collected for blessing the children.

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\* Between 1922 and 1924 some 1,350,000 Greeks were ejected by Kemal Pasha from Turkey.



Collected when children died of malnutrition in these filthy surroundings. Collected when adults married, died or, overwrought by lack of news, wanted a few Masses said for some bread-winner far away on a leaky Greek freighter. At election time you saw them going from house to house explaining that the saints were agreed that the rich grocer, Papachristopoulos, a pious man who gave liberally to the church, should be elected. The "Blacks", as the populace and some irreverent youths called the clergy, well understood their position as instruments of power; they incited and calmed the mob as directed by their masters, the gentlemen living in the villas of Glyphada and the gardens of Kiphissia.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

BETWEEN THE *Oran* and a coaler flying the Union Jack lay the German ship *Weser* unloading machinery. Huge cranes lifted the crates that were stamped "Made in Germany". Two men of the *Weser's* crew were coming along the already deserted dock; it was about eight o'clock. I sat leaning against a pile and waiting for their approach.

"Pardon me, gentlemen from the *Weser*," I said in German. "You wish to see the sights and perhaps find some good German restaurant?"

I was at some pains to express myself smoothly and urbanely, so as not to be mistaken, despite my appearance, for a sponger. The surprise captured them and curiosity held them. I told them much of my story and all of my present predicament as I showed them a good eating place, the International Bar, and various resorts. The younger German was a member of the Communist Party. He agreed to take me on board with him, help me stow away, and feed me as far as their Black Sea port of call, Constanza.

I bade farewell to Kokkinia and my shoe-shine outfit and got safely aboard, hid myself behind some big crates, and lay



thinking of the promise of the unknown morrow. The *Weser* was to sail at six in the morning. I was growing drowsy, and, happy in the thought that I would wake in mid-ocean, I propped my head on my arms and lay in a dreamy state somewhere between waking and sleeping.

But I had dreamed too soon. Round the corner of the crate came a detail of men in uniform. They seized me and drove me from my corner with kicks and blows. I was handcuffed and, guarded by soldiers with rifles, conducted to the electric train from Piraeus to Athens. At the Athens Commandery an officer, when they woke him up, cursed me liberally. The same three officers who had benevolently inducted me some months ago now constituted themselves a special court-martial and apathetically sentenced me to spend the rest of my military service at a frontier post in Thrace.

At the frontier post there was a strong element of danger. The intensely nationalistic Macedonian peasants known as *Komitadjis* were ready to shed blood for the independence of their mountains.

My company's assignment was to guard the tracks of the Simplon Orient express, which had been derailed again and again. Two of our sentries had fallen asleep at their posts, and had been found with their heads battered in. Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, as well as Greece, had instituted special patrols against the *Komitadjis*. The Macedonian peasants went routinely about their harvesting by day, but became clever partisans at night. We hunted everywhere for them, arrested suspects, and shot on sight peasants found in the mountains after midnight. But the *Komitadjis* continued their night prowling, regularly polishing off Greek soldiers, Bulgarian sentries and Yugoslav customs officials. It gave one an eerie feeling as one built up the fire against the cold of night, listened to the jackals' howls, and heard firing in the distance that woke echoes in the mountains.

One night I was awakened by a companion at the outpost. We heard noises in the ravine beneath us. Corporal Christides of Patras woke up; he was the son of a Venizelist official.

"*Pou pas?* Who goes there?"

Something stirred in the undergrowth. Christides fired his Mannlicher several times. The shots re-echoed. The fire was returned from a distance and some slugs whizzed past us. I joined Christides in firing and after a time the shooting stopped.



In the morning we found a lad in the undergrowth scarcely sixteen years old, riddled with bullets. He had a rifle and a knife of German manufacture; "Solingen" was engraved in the fine steel. Our dogs followed his scent to a neighbouring village but we found nothing except a few sleepy peasant huts with old women sitting at the windows, black shawls over their heads. The men were in the fields. The following Sunday one of the old women came to claim the boy's body.

Not long after, Corporal Christides disappeared. The Bulgarian frontier guards sent his barbarically mutilated body back to us some weeks later. To his blood-clotted shirt was pinned a slogan: "For Free Macedonia!"

Those sent to the frontier, with a few exceptions, were persons of whom the War Department in Athens wished to be rid; alleged radicals, labour organizers, malcontents and Leftist students from the University, as well as other political opponents. My own experience had not been such as to stimulate me to any pitch of intense zeal on behalf of the Venizelos government, and indeed, I was within an ace of attempting a second escape from the army and joining forces with the revolutionary Macedonian group. I talked plans with a fellow conscript who had made connections with the independence movement, and one Sunday we descended to the village to see Karambaeff, a somewhat deaf but very muscular Bulgarian peasant who had taken part in terrorist acts, notably the throwing of a bomb into the cathedral at Sofia in 1925. He showed us a manifesto, "Free Macedonia", published in Paris, which he could recite by rote. His hut was very clean and had draperies in the window. He served us lamb's head with garlic sauce. If we would bring our rifles and could get hold of a Hotchkiss machine gun, he promised us a safe conduct across the frontier and assured us we might lead a good life in a Bulgarian village, harvesting tobacco in the daytime and prowling with the armed bands at night.

We talked of crossing Bulgaria, Rumania and Bessarabia and reaching the Russian frontier. There we would present ourselves to the frontier guards and explain everything.

Meanwhile another Easter had come round. I looked back over the past year. It seemed an uninterrupted series of evil impressions, none of which, in relation to me, appeared to make sense, so that it was all like the story of something that might have happened to someone else. The accompanying feeling of irrelevance and unreality drove me to sporadic and eccentric



self-assertion. One such seizure developed on Easter Sunday when I was compelled to join in the mockery of prayers at the church.

My fellow soldiers had an air of morose solemnity. The children craned their necks at the priest as he spoke unintelligible words, to which the wrinkled peasants in their Sunday best responded in unison. For a change this was a shabby little church with a plain wooden cross and few ikons—none of the Byzantine splendour of gold, silver and curious ornament which serves to drug the mind of the illiterate peasantry. Since the beginning of the Mass I had kept yawning desperately. Towards the end of the service everyone got in line, with the officers at the head, to kiss the priest's hand. The soldier in front of me knelt in awe and I hardly recognized him as a foul-mouthed and blasphemous companion of weekdays.

When the priest extended his hand to me, I took it and shook it.

A stir and murmur of surprise ran through the church and the captain gave me an angry glance. He knew my religious views. The priest's hand was warm and soft. I quickly dropped it. He was too startled to remember the gesture of blessing his children. The sergeant looked daggers at me before going to take his usual coffee at the village brothel. "Russian ruffian!" I overheard him exclaim. I was brought before a disciplinary board for obduracy and insurrection against the state, for of course the state and Church were one.

Our captain, George Karavillis by name, interested me, and, what is more to the point as affecting my destiny, I interested him. He was of medium height and strongly built, with a broad face of a rather Slavic cast. He was a perfect officer on duty, but a drunkard in his free time. His career had started splendidly in the entourage of King Constantine. Although trained at St. Cyr, speaking French perfectly, and married to a Frenchwoman, the daughter of a colonel and instructor at the French military academy, he detested the Allies, who had bombarded Athens in 1916. In June, 1917, he had accompanied King Constantine, the Queen, and Prince George abroad. Returning to Greece, he served under Constantine's second son, Alexander. The latter died in 1920 from the effects of a monkey's bite incurred in the royal park at Athens. When Elefteros Venizelos succeeded the royal family as undisputed master of Greece, Captain Karavillis was packed off to our forlorn outpost. He was living in a white-



washed cottage with his very delicate blonde wife, diverting himself with hunting and excessive drinking.

Karavillis and I had developed a deep friendship. He was familiar with all the obscure political intrigues in the Balkans from the picturesque days of the Sultans, knew the ins and outs of the very complex contemporary situation in south-eastern Europe, and was acquainted with such personalities as Nicolas Politis and others who were representing Greece in the League of Nations at Geneva. We exchanged ideas at great length. I was able to tell him a good deal about Germany, Russia, and Scandinavia, calling up incidents, describing people and unconsciously getting into shape material which on his advice I later turned into newspaper articles.

Karavillis displayed special interest in my personal history and predicted a brilliant future for me in Greece if I remained there after my military service was completed. He believed the monarchy would be restored and wished me to attach myself to the Royalist cause. One of his intimate friends was Georgios Kondylis, the future Dictator of Greece, with whom I later became acquainted.

Of course, I had been starved for conversation. Moreover, the number of persons who display an intelligent interest and take a hopeful view of a young man's future are normally few. That, at least, was the norm in my generation. And George Karavillis, in my case, was the first. Until then it seemed not to have occurred to anyone that my future was of any consequence. Naturally I was touched and responsive when, one day, he talked to me like a father and urged me to give up the idea of deserting. I had started to save up money and assemble equipment and he had read the signs. I had still four months to serve, plus three penalties for disobedience. Karavillis promised to intercede for me at Athens. He arranged to take German lessons from me and he paid me enough to buy cigarettes and visit a woman occasionally, a widow with great black eyes and long melancholy lashes, who bore the classic name of Andromache. I put the money under her pillow.

The term of service seemed endless, but all things have an end. And accordingly the bright day dawned when, in a patched coat and trousers faded to an indefinable hue, I was for the first time at large in the streets of Athens, a free man with discharge papers in my pocket which might be displayed to any suspicious challenger of my liberty. For food I was limited to taverns where they served bean soup for two



drachmas. My reading was newspapers that had been left on park benches. But at least I was free and I was, for the first time since leaving Russia, in a land where, whatever the cost, my claims to citizenship had been validated.

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## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

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IN A COURT opening off the little alley known as Themistocles Street I saw a blue-lettered sign. It read: "Deutsche Buchhandlung. Kurt Werner, Proprietor". The door of the little shop had been left ajar on account of the warmth of the day. From the back room where the owner lived and from which he could survey the shop, the court, and a bit of the street, I could hear a voice humming some bars of a familiar German revolutionary song. The bell tinkled and Kurt Werner came forward to greet a visitor whom he must have viewed as queer, for my head was shaven and my uniform was in tatters.

Werner wore a dark brown suit and narrow black tie despite the heat of the day. He had deep-set eyes almost hidden by bushy brows, a square forceful chin, and flaxen hair. He was tall and stooped somewhat, which gave an apish swing to his long loose-hung arms. His legs were disproportionately short, a deformity emphasized by his having simply rolled up the cuffs of his overlong trousers. Deep lines grooved his forehead and bracketed a wide mouth. In short, he was anyone's idea of the Neanderthal man.

He addressed me in bad Greek and I answered in perfect German, asking him for a copy of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte*. My command of the language startled him no less than the nature of my request. His eyes opened wide for an instant. It was then that I first became aware of their colour: a sharp blue-grey.

Kurt Werner was a true book-lover. I could sense it in his way of fingering the bindings and tidying his shelves as he inquired into my tastes. Ludwig Renn, the two Zweigs, Remarque, and Thomas Mann were prominently displayed,



On a table at the back I saw the Karl Liebknecht House publications and issues of *Rote Fahne*. The *Arbeiter Illustrierte* was tucked away under fashion magazines from Ullstein and Scherl's *Woche*. Werner followed my roving glance with a smile of complicity—or the beginning of one. For it gave place instantly to a look of suspicion and menace that was quite in the Neanderthal manner. Any moment I expected him to shout, "Spying, are you?"

But something allayed his distrust, possibly my hungry look of a person long deprived of books, newspapers or any connection with the great world. He smiled, revealing a simple and even naïve goodness behind his outward savagery. We talked for hours over coffee and *glikos*\* in his back room. Werner was a native of Hamburg, but like me, had lived in Neukölln at Berlin. All my Berlin past came back to me. He knew friends of Gerda's. We talked of people and places and the course of events. It was sunset when I left, my arms crammed with newspapers, to mingle with the chattering multitude that was pouring down University Avenue. I was whistling the tune I had overheard Werner humming.

By now my life must surely have turned the worst corner! Hope stirred in me. I could read; I was back in a civilized world. Werner had urged me to come back and placed his books freely at my disposal. Shaking his hand at parting, I had seen that his eyes were loyal. I felt gay and buoyant and recalled with satisfaction Captain Karavillis's hopes for my future.

I became an habitu   of the store in Themistocles Street and was happy in the associations it opened to me. I met German engineers employed by the electric, gas and telephone companies; employees of Siemens Schuckert; governesses, Germans married to Greek women. I met the German consul, Timm, from Piraeus, the chaplain of the German Embassy, newspaper correspondents, commercial agents and hikers who were coming down the Danube and invading the Balkans by dozens. They wore short trousers, these hikers, carried rucksacks, and lived by occasional labour. The Greeks took them genially. Fine people, the Germans! They would smile encouragingly as if to say, "Poor fellows, so nice, so intelligent. Victims of that Versailles Treaty!"

Talk at the German bookshop was generally political and resembled what might have been heard at a corner of Friedrichstrasse or Unter den Linden. All the views prevailing

\* Fruit preserve.



under Brüning were represented. Books were sold ranging from the most reactionary to the most radical viewpoints. One might open a copy of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, jeer at it, and take up the *Berliner Tageblatt*. Five thousand Germans were living in Greece and holding important positions in commerce and industry. They contributed everything from aspirin tablets up to heavy locomotives and Diesel engines. They brought their wives and sent their children to the German school on the Likavetos hilltop. Close friends of Kurt Werner lingered by his round table long after the store had been double-locked and shuttered; endlessly they would discuss events in Germany, the future of the proletarian revolution.

I learned later that Werner had been involved in the bloody Hamburg revolt of 1923. He sprang from a family of workers living in the narrow streets of St. Pauli. His father had been lost on a submarine. The tradition of the family was revolutionary. At seventeen Kurt had left school and joined the Spartakus group. After 1919 he became a liaison agent for the Party, joining in the struggle against Kapp and Lüttwitz and helping organize the Red Front at Halle. He had been confined three years at the Moabit prison. Later he worked among Hamburg seamen and maintained contact with the Communist centre in Berlin. One day a policeman and an SA leader were found riddled with a dozen shots at a beer joint near the Reeperbahn. Falsely accused, Werner had to leave Germany. The Party assisted him in his flight via Holland, Marseilles, and Alexandria to Athens. Friends offered him posts as correspondent of the *Rote Fahne*, *Die Welt am Abend* and the *Arbeiter Illustrierte*. Later he undertook to be distributor of these publications as well as other proletarian literature in Greece. Salonika and Macedonia especially were fruitful territories. Under Venizelos the sale and distribution of the literature was dangerous. The secret police watched Werner's every movement. But protestations sent occasionally from the Ministry of the Interior to the German Embassy remained unnoticed; the Communist Party then had seventy-nine members in the Reichstag.

So the German bookstore flourished. There good Germans could find their Wilhelm Busches, their illustrateds, cook books and sentimental novels; Greek architects, their technical periodicals; and physicians, their manuals of surgery. German publishers sent stacks of merchandise. Werner's establishment was more than a store; it was the outpost of German democratic thinking in Greece.



We all followed with passionate interest the struggles of the two German extremist parties. Young engineers returned home with the latest copy of *Rote Fahne* in one pocket, containing a speech of Torgler's, and in the other a copy of the *Angriff*, in which Dr. Goebbels promised German domination of Europe and half the world.

Once a week the nursemaids, led by the wife of the chief engineer of the telephone company, held coffee parties at the store and chatted of their beloved homeland. Political topics were then put aside; the women were mostly German Nationalist and Catholic Clerical in their views.

Kurt Werner disliked the Thursday afternoon coffee parties, but had to consider his living. When anyone would ask for one of Hugenberg's papers or even a *Vossische Zeitung*, he would crawl under the tables, hunt everywhere seemingly without success and then offer, with an air of innocence, a copy of the *Rote Fahne*, as being the most recent paper received. He lost many customers that way and came at length to produce Communist literature only after giving his customer the once-over. For there were few workers about; the middle class predominated among the Germans in Greece.

Werner was a fanatical revolutionary; he had faith in the German proletariat and chafed under his exile. When two lads brought the mail at noon, he pounced on the parcels and tore off the wrappings. He devoured pamphlets from Berlin and Hamburg. The Simplon Orient express always brought him news of the Party. His communism was a religion.

However, he viewed Russia with a certain scepticism and maintained that when revolution came to Germany, Germans would handle it better. Agents of the Comintern visited him occasionally with letters of recommendation and instructions. He was proud of German science and industry and the signed photographs of Willy Münzenberg and Ernst Thälmann which hung over his unmade bed with inscriptions, "To our beloved fellow combatant". In the back room was the traditional can of coffee, a cup with the inscription, "Who lives shall see", and some liverwurst which, with occasional tomatoes, eked out his frugal meals. He did not like the oily, highly seasoned Greek food. "Pig food," he would grumble between clenched teeth which were big and square, yet widely spaced. At times, forgetful of patrons, sales and stock, he would sit down with a visitor behind the table piled high with literature and expound Karl Marx. He would argue, plead, orate and pound the table so that books flew higher than his luckless



victim's head. To conclude he would press several newspapers into the latter's hand.

"Money?" He would wave his hand with deprecation. "Forget it. Read those papers and come back for some more!"

When he read the *Völkischer Beobachter* he would wear a malignant expression, would laugh, and have a high time quite alone. "Ah, that Joseph—that Heinz!" He called all the National Socialist leaders by the familiar names used in the Berlin workers' quarter at Neukölln. Then his sense of humour would desert him. His hair would fall over his forehead and he would scream, "Damn traitor!" The Greek shopkeepers adjacent believed him to be touched in the head. If he was in the mood he was quite capable of booting the landlord out when he came to collect the rent. The neighbours feared his savage form. "The German is cross to-day," they would say.

Three times a day I went up to the top of the *Likavetos* where the German school was situated and distributed the daily papers I was selling for Mr. Werner. I went whistling from house to house as I dropped books and periodicals. Often I was asked to have a glass of wine in a café. I spent my spare time poking about on the look-out for tourists whom I might serve as a guide. The competition was ferocious, so that the guides detested one another and would even inform against one another to the police. For my patter I assumed the tone of a tragedian: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are before the shrine of culture, the sacred temple of our race, the Acropolis, cradle of civilization." I rendered such formulae into English, German and French for tourists in shell-rimmed spectacles bearing cameras, shaven-headed German professors, provincial French school-teachers and dry Scotsmen.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you behold through the mist of olive branches . . . delicate yet enduring forms of the Propylaeum . . . What sentiments swell our bosoms as we gaze . . . bases of the columns restored in the eighteenth century." I never failed to dwell on the ravages wrought by invaders and besiegers or to denounce them as barbarians; and sometimes I would catch a Frenchman nodding his head and glaring fiercely at some bespectacled German member of the party, in the firm conviction that vandalism was one of the many deplorable German propensities and that the remnants of ancient glory were at that moment exposed to sudden attack.

The marble forms actually were worthy of a less hackneyed



eloquence. But when I wanted to admire them, and listen to the wind whispering among the stones, I visited them quite alone. Often, too, my profound admiration for the architecture of antiquity got the upper hand and, inspired by some traveller who had come with a deep, sincere devotion, I would achieve a more genuine utterance, recalling myself to the present only at supper, when an unappetizing meal, amid twentieth-century cockroaches, restored me to reality.

“Hello, hello! *Saturday Evening Post, l’Illustration, Corriere della Sera, Woche.*”

I was plying the decks of the *General von Steuben*, which was packed with tourists on a Mediterranean cruise. The band played lively marches. Greenish pools of oil lay in the folds of the blue waves. First-class and cabin passengers had a deck to themselves. Some boys were swimming around the boat to catch pennies tossed to them. Manicured hands tossed a few coins, flinging them at random into the Mediterranean. Politics and business were being discussed in all languages with much reference to figures. Alongside the *Steuben* lay an impeccable white Dollar Line ship, even more splendid. English and American tourists stared vacantly at Piraeus, discussing stocks. A woman in tortoise-shell glasses was drinking whisky.

These were the supermen and women, modern demigods, heedless of the Olympians. I had seen them in North African ports, in the Red Sea and along the Atlantic coasts, when their immense white floating palaces passed our dirty freighter. I had seen them amuse themselves watching Negro boys dive for coins in shark-infested waters. The blacks would dive under the propellers and sometimes a shark got an arm or leg . . .

Having disposed of my publications, I generally went down into the crew’s quarters; I always had some copies of radical papers to distribute. The greasy tattooed seamen fairly snatched at them, and served me ham and eggs on the American boats and sausage on the German. Only a deck separated these two so different worlds, that of the tattooed arms and that of the bored fashion mannequins. Often members of a crew came to the bookstore; Werner supplied to them all the radical trade-unionist and communist literature. The seamen would describe the most recent developments at Hamburg and tell of the desperate battle on the waterfront between National Socialist and Leftist organizations.

Very few were Nazis. The seaman, from his habit of travel, is an internationalist. He is seldom arrogant. The ship’s crews



were prone to sympathize with the masses of Athens and Piraeus. They were courteous and keenly interested, eager to listen and learn. They found time to visit the Acropolis while the passengers from their ships were swilling in the night clubs of the Rue du Stade.

Months passed. I went about with my newspapers, acted as tourists' guide, and translated letters for merchants on the Omonia. I earned more than the little that I needed. On Sundays I put on a neat blue jacket and went to the German Philadelphia Club and sat in a corner drinking beer with German mechanics, talking politics and making friends. The "advanced" group invited me to its meetings and I made several political speeches that drew felicitations.

Like the Fatherland, the German colony was split into factions. Each received instructions from Berlin. The caste system, too, was in force here. The Nationalists and the National Socialists were drawing closer together while the radicals and Socialists endeavoured to make common cause, alarmed by reports that reached them daily. All the members of the Philadelphia Club were on the *qui vive* and expected important developments: a merchant who served as agent for several chemical firms, a professor of German at a Greek school, the representative of the German Institute of Archæology, the Lufthansa pilots and the mechanics from the Siemens telephone company. I knew all of them, their homes, their salaries and habits. I knew what each was reading and how each felt on public questions. Governesses confided to me their lives in rich Greek households. I visited university courses. Articles contributed to the Athens *Messenger* brought me in a few drachmas. Some Greek papers used my news stories and travel articles. Nearly every evening found me at Kurt Werner's shop, where Republicans, Socialists and Communist sympathizers rallied. There I met Dr. Mayer, Hans Hatesaul, and the patriarch of the German colony, Hausdorfer—besides correspondents, writers, archæologists, painters and schoolmasters who had come to study Greek antiquities.

Often I relieved Werner, so that he had more time for political activities. He kept up communication with the Berlin Communist organizations and throughout the network of Greek undercover activities in the army, among students at Athens, and among convicts and refugees in the islands and seaports. The Party was fairly strong in Salonika. An intelligent and cultivated Spaniole, son of a wealthy Salonika



businessman, was its organizer there. A doctor of medicine was one of the leading figures in the southern district of Greece and controlled the Communist paper *Rizospastis*. As I was not a Party member, Werner kept me at a distance when there were party meetings.

Agents of the secret police kept an eye on the bookstore, watching Greek customers closely. However, the business flourished, and customers poured in from all sides. Schools sent in orders. Clergymen ordered Bibles. The store expanded. The shelves groaned with volumes. German publishers sent all their titles on consignment. I worked late at night making up order lists, besides writing articles and preparing my next speeches for the Philadelphia Club.

One day Kurt Werner was arrested and charged with conspiring against the security of the state. The best Athens lawyers pleaded for his release. Meanwhile I managed the store. Werner was acquitted through the intermediation of the German Embassy; by now there were eighty-nine Communist deputies in the Reichstag and the Communist Party was the third strongest in the Fatherland. But the law of Greece specified that Werner should take a business partner of Greek citizenship; by a recent decree of the Venizelos government, the business must either become a Greek enterprise or close its doors.

Thus it was that on a very hot July afternoon, which was to be decisive in my life, Werner left off stamping up and down the store, swearing vociferously, and all at once came to a pause before me. For a moment he considered, then made his proposition: fifty per cent. of the profits if I would become his Greek partner.

For a moment I was stupefied. Then I hastily accepted. I had abruptly ceased to be a prowling and penniless vagabond news vendor!

I began working night and day in the store, enabling Werner to give his time entirely to politics. The sign by the door now read, "International Bookstore and Newspaper Agency" and my name appeared underneath as joint owner. My life changed abruptly. I was invited to teas by the German Embassy chaplain, by the envoy's wife, Frau Doktor Eisenlohr, by the Consul, Timm, by the agent of the Merck chemical firm, and by the nephew of Admiral Klöbe. I now had a regular table at the Philadelphia Club and was granted a certain recognition and authority.

All sorts came to the bookstore, from persons of assured



position and intellectual distinction to commercial travellers, political refugees, Catholic nuns returning from tours to Palestine, adventurers and even counterfeiters—in short, everyone who travelled to the Near East. We stocked the classics along with the latest newspapers, current books, and technological handbooks on electricity or reinforced concrete. Our store became the exclusive agency for the chief German publishing houses, Ullstein, Scherl, Rudolf Mosse, Knorr & Hirth, and for such papers as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*. I was creating a central distributing agency for German, Czech, Austrian and Hungarian publications. Little by little outlets were being established in every Greek city. The consuls of various countries congratulated me on this work. Special news stands were set up for Central European publications. The business grew. I travelled throughout the Greek peninsula.

Soon the members of the colony were clamouring for a German-language paper at Athens that would give them up-to-date news. The chancellor of the Embassy offered me every help in organizing such a paper. Accordingly, the *Griechische Post* was founded, with the printing firm run by the brothers Kukuzides handling the technical side of the business.

Dr. Mayer and I—he was an experienced German newspaperman formerly on the staff of the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*—edited the first editions from a tiny office. The paper found readers. Presently such firms as the *Kölnische Zeitung* and the *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* made me their Greek correspondent. I enlisted the aid of persons who would give their best to the building of an intellectual centre in the Balkans. Above my work table hung a large picture of Brüning—embodying the spirit of the *Griechische Post*. Brüning was to be the last premier of democratic Germany.



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*CHAPTER FORTY-SIX*

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THE RUE DU STADE, lined with monuments to Greek statesmen, connects two spacious squares, the Place de l'Omonia and the Place du Régiment. The Vouli, or legislative building, stands midway in the broad avenue, with its modern stores, handsome bank buildings, and animated cafés. Traversing the Place du Régiment, you enter the Royal Park with its avenues of trees, its lawns, shrubberies, and pleached alleys. In this section are villas, consulates, embassies, foreign clubs and expensive places of resort. Here are the homes of tobacco merchants and wealthy importers, men like the millionaires Benakis, Papastratos and Karajorgis, who shape the destinies of the nation. Here you will find the marble palaces of the Embericos, in odd contrast with the dilapidated ships from which they derive their revenues.

Farther towards the Leoforos Singru, at a yet higher altitude in the literal and figurative sense, is that Greek arch of triumph, the Acropolis. Excavations in the Agora, at the time of which I write, were proceeding under the care of several archæological foundations. Neither tourists nor natives seemed to think of the Acropolis as bearing any relation to the modern city, which was, in contrast, only a big cheap bazaar, teeming with Armenians and Anatolian Greeks who peddled lottery tickets and smelly merchandise, or were brokers in currency exchanges where counterfeit money was as acceptable as the genuine article. Although more papers were published in Athens than in all the rest of the Balkans together, illiteracy was common, and most of those who could read had to shape the words with their lips while reading. Venizelos, the modern Pericles, who ruled this nation where the rich were too rich and the poor were too poor, was no more than a Cretan schoolmaster with a white goatee, spectacles and skullcap, who spent his wife's millions freely for endless electoral campaigns. Never was there a personality in Balkan politics more hated by some and more loved by others.



In the Leoforos Ambelokipos was the German Embassy. I spent some hours there every day working with a secretary who functioned as press attaché. Together we went over editorial policies and articles to appear in the *Griechische Post*. In the *couloirs* of the Embassy I got a sense of the powerful forces which would determine Greece's destiny, and won an insight into the complications of Balkan politics and the relationship of the great powers towards various factions in Greek political life. Next in importance to the Embassy was the German Club, a very decisive factor in the life of all Germans living in Greece.

The German Philadelphia Club was in a narrow street off the Rue Panepistimion. It was a paradoxical name for a club where members of ten or more quarrelsome political parties from half a dozen states north of the Danube met to drink beer and sing.

To the bootblacks of the quarter, with whose viewpoint I could claim some acquaintance, these *xenos* were merely an exceptionally pink-complexioned lot of foreigners who consumed an enviable quantity of potatoes and sausages. But I was coming to know the Germans more discriminately, with reference to their occupations and individual outlooks. I would enter with a questioning glance at Herr Hase at the desk.

"Yes, you'll find them all here. Go on in."

The high ceiling of the big lounge was supported by pillars. Dr. Mayer, my sabre-scarred colleague of the *Griechische Post*, with his pointed nose and gold-rimmed spectacles, would be talking with Hatesaul, the *Kölnische Illustrierte's* young photographer. At the other end of the room would be smooth-shaven Hausdorfer, holding forth on the subject of Ionic friezes to a group of newcomers, supported by Wagner of the German Institute of Archæology. Fräulein Riede, an Embassy secretary, would look up from the table and smile. Kattentiedt and Krause were deep in chess. Air pilot Röder would be loudly proclaiming the virtues of German Nationalism. . . .

I often went to see Röder, who was the chief pilot and director of the Athens Lufthansa. He occupied a sumptuous apartment made possible by his thirty thousand drachmas a month. At his place I met other pilots of the company. There was air service between Athens and Berlin three times weekly. Most of the pilots were veterans of the World War; others had been designers and engineers for Junkers in Dessau and had seen service in South Africa and China. Röder had a Russian wife, a mild woman with kind brown eyes, whom he had met



while he was a pilot on the Teheran line. She played the piano and sang ballads and they were very unhappy. Ultimately she left him and eloped with a Russian mural painter, a former Guards officer. Her sister and her father, an ex-colonel whom she had brought on from Teheran, detested Röder; but his salary exceeded the aggregate earnings of all the Russians who had sent flowers to her.

Röder detested Russians. He charged that their Oriental policy in Iran failed to square with their revolutionary professions. "A queer people. Look at my Olga. Instead of going to Frau Klöbe's, she spends her time fiddling at the piano, and then, those gypsy songs! No, it's beyond me. I'm always amazed at the Russians but can never like them or feel easy about them. They're too courteous, too restless, too insolent. Then, they talk so much and are so casual. And such thieves! Always stealing, everything and everywhere. White or Red, what's the difference? We got into the Ukraine once and set things to rights for a bit. But wait till Germany gets going." He leaned towards Olga, who was pressing a handkerchief to her nose with her habitual tragic air. His ugly face was contorted and he chuckled, breathing the inquiry, "That's right, isn't it? They're all thieves; they'd even steal your wife."

Röder's life had acquainted him only with flying and the military career. After the demobilization he had realized that there was nothing for him to do in Germany. In his later army years in Richthofen's circus, he had begun using cocaine, depending on drugs to subdue his sudden rages. His bitterness at his country's defeat sent him to China, where he served free-booting generals, and then to Bolivia and Argentina. A short, testy man, he had amazing energy and will to act. Hunger drove him to take a mechanic's job in Buenos Aires. He flew old machines, gave flying lessons, did publicity stunts, and performed exhibition feats on Sundays. After years of poverty he returned to his native city, Dessau, and resumed employment at the Junker aircraft plant.

During the war he had flown over enemy territory with Lörzer and Richthofen and Goering, and had brought down fifteen Allied planes. He had been often wounded and would roll up his shirtsleeves to display red scars on his pink flesh overgrown with reddish hair. He was regarded as daring. No one could predict his reactions at the Philadelphia; he spent freely but people feared his energy as much as his brutality. His wife in particular. Combat flying suited him to a T and he was looking forward to the second world war to restore German



power. When, in June, 1929, his friend Captain Hermann Goering mounted the tribune of the Reichstag to make his first speech and proposed developing a vast German air fleet, a commercial fleet, to be sure, and demanded the creation of an air ministry, Röder was exultant and bought drinks all round. He had everyone in and broached two kegs of beer: they sang "Deutschland über Alles" till dawn. They forced the proprietor of the Greek tavern to sing, too, and poured raisin wine down his gullet.

Röder had a taste for brutalities. One day I saw him kicking a Greek newspaper vendor. He disciplined the mechanics of the Tatoi aerodrome with his own hands. He had flown over the region a hundred times and knew the map of the Balkans by heart. Röder and his friend Hans Schmitz were deeply interested in aerial photography and charting. The latter had been given the *Pour le mérite*, the highest distinction in the German army. He was always at Röder's place or at one of the cabarets of the Omonia. His sex diversions were the talk of taxi-drivers at the cab stand before the Chat Noir.

The two friends spent whole evenings at a bar, discussing politics and events or the new Jumo Diesel engines of the new Junkers model. In the near future, Schmitz would declare, or at least after a period of seeming inactivity, there would be a sudden aeronautic action, decisive both militarily and politically. He would lower his head, glare at his glass, then stare at me with his watery blue eyes. The decision, he said, would be much more prompt than people imagined. Röder, in his grave sombre voice, would agree: "Yes, prompter and more terrible. People have no idea how crushing it will be. And it's up to us of the old World War circus to get the planes ready."

Röder was a German Nationalist. When I mentioned the French army and air fleet beyond the Rhine, Röder waxed sarcastic. Once he burst from deep meditation to remark: "Germany is making preparations, but for such a war as the world has never before seen, a profoundly different sort of war. You know the Allies still look back to the war of 1914." He smiled. "They will have a war of 1939 or 1940 which will be something else again." He was thinking aloud. "A powerful air fleet of great mechanical complexity built up with minute care over many long years. And, then, a quick and final decision. That will be the next war." Then he lowered his voice confidentially and added: "Rid yourself of that Com-



munist Werner. I tell you Germany is awakening! All of that stripe are sure to be hanged."

Meanwhile Röder ordered champagne, the best brand, of which he consumed a great deal. Some years later he became one of the most important men of the Luftwaffe in the entourage of Air General Milch.

The Röder-Schmitz infusion at the Philadelphia Club was becoming rather too pungent, especially for the taste of the better educated and more cultivated habitués. But there was a tavern under the Acropolis; the owner had learned a few German words and set forth generous portions of lamb. The patrons were persons of culture, including Greek doctors, lawyers and engineers who had studied abroad. The German Liberal element liked to sit with them over raisin wine around the red tablecloths, and indeed Germans fraternized with Greeks more readily than Frenchmen or Englishmen did.

There were Hausdorfer the stout amateur archæologist who by trade was agent of a chemical firm; big Hess, foreman of a textile mill; Dietrich, machinery expert of the Papastratos tobacco factory in Piræus; Merl, Siemens' Austrian technician; and Hauser, who had come to Greece penniless and now employed twenty persons in his own engineering firm. There were also the archæologists from the Institute, excited about their excavations and eager to discuss the geometry of Phidias', Callicrates' and Ictinos' columns. We were free in the realm of ideas and took the world apart and put it together again. It was an agreeable sample of Republican Germany and of the intellectual and civilized Germany which has a longer history.

I ponder on all these faces, the bald foreheads, the intelligent young features, the adolescents and the men of sober maturity, savants, artists, workers, and men of affairs, absorbed in their tasks, but neither scornful of nor indifferent to men of other races and divergent interests. I associate them with fine evenings under the Acropolis and with the reading room of the German bookstore, where, their day's work over, they might often be found bending over books, magazines or papers. They read much and with close attention. The colony comprised only some thousands of men, but they gobbled up hundreds of volumes every month and thousands of newspapers and periodicals. Remembering them, I find it not difficult to suppose that Germany, once freed of her present medievalism and restored to liberty and the humanistic spirit, will again



have contributions to make to the development of the human race. To the remnants of such an élite must fall the task of re-educating their nation. The maniac visage is not the only or the normal countenance of Germania.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

THE TONE OF THE Philadelphia Club was growing daily more distasteful. My Berlin experience had inoculated me against the Nazi virus. I was partly bored and partly, and properly, alarmed as I saw it working in others. The air was thick with the germ. Heel-clicking was on the increase and inane harangues were incessant. There was, for instance, an Austrian dentist with a special knack of interpreting the gospel sexually and embellishing it with psychopathological patter, to the almost hysterical delight of a foul-complexioned, twenty-year-old degenerate grandson of a German Rear-admiral. This youth delighted in the thought of 15,000,000 Jews being castrated; he would send for the *Stürmer* from Franconia and read the abominable sheet aloud. Evenings at the Club would be spent working up animosity against the "Talmudic" democracies, "poisonous" Russia, and Negroid America, and that "ambush of Jewish sophistry", the Social Democratic Party. Prominent "Jews" such as Bela Kun, Litvinov, Masaryk, Trotsky, and Churchill were raked over the coals! The merriment would culminate in a descent on a brothel in the Omonia quarter, where sadistic inventions were practised to the discomfiture of luckless girls from the ghetto of Salonika. The mechanic Wiener would then lead a raid on news-stalls, removing non-Nazi papers and compelling sleepy old Greek vendors to exhibit instead the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Later, as president of the Athens Foreign Newsvendors' Association, I had to bring in strong-arm men to defend shops from such attacks. All this was only a prelude. Goering's men had not yet fired the Reichstag; the German Republic was still feebly fighting for its life.



But already Nazi intrigue, pressure, and seizure of power was made vivid to me by the mounting vigour, fanaticism and brutishness of the Führer's agents in South-east Europe, as they pushed themselves forward. Hitlerites overran the place. In the name of nationalism they permitted themselves every crime.

There were only hints of the future to be observed in these fall days of 1931. Yet already the character of many of my German friends was undergoing a transformation. My docile acquaintances became arrogant; the arrogant, openly criminal.

First it was my accountant, Jäger. He had a way of vanishing for several days into the bars of Omonia. His wife would arm herself with an umbrella and go to look for him. He was a hunchback and an alcoholic. The Greeks sitting in their sidewalk cafés would shout after him: "Hey, German! Hey, Jäger, a glass of raisin wine?" Drinking, he would relate in mixed German and Greek some tale of the Great War, indicating on the white marble tables the position of the attacking American troops at Chateau Thierry. One morning Jäger struck a Napoleonic attitude and informed me that *his* blood was pure. Greek and Roman civilization having vanished, Germany had become humanity's great hope, for *its* blood was pure. He showed me proudly his insigne of the National Socialist Workers' Front. Since he spoke of blood, I reminded him that Dr. Zefirakis had phoned to remind Jäger to come and have his salvarsan injection. Forgetting for the moment the purity of his blood, my accountant returned to his work.

Karl Kudorfer, whom I opposed in numerous political discussions at the Philadelphia Club at Athens, had a bad reputation. Several writs of expulsion from Greece had been issued against him on account of his skulduggery. His identification papers described him as a chauffeur. He had married a Greek woman much older than himself, thus acquiring a considerable amount of money. His wife's relatives were gratified by her union with a former German non-com.

Kudorfer had chanced to be in the square before the Feldherren Hall in Munich during the Bürgerbrau putsch. A native of Munich, he joined Heinz's brigade in 1921. In 1922 he organized terrorist demonstrations in the Ruhr, worked in a political and military espionage service, and was condemned in the courts of Elberfeld and Essen to prison terms. He took part later in sabotage against the French military occupation authorities, and, suspected by the Germans



of French loyalties and by the French of being in the service of the German general staff, he was forced to quit the Rhineland. Some years later he figured in the records of the Berlin *Kriminal Polizei* as an extortioner and matrimonial racketeer.

About 1925 he came to Greece to represent a toilet-paper firm. Business was bad, but he bought a car with his wife's money. He displayed a certain stamina. In the years when the Führer was travelling from German town to German town, Kudorfer emulated him in Greece, visiting every German colony and distributing the Nazi literature that was sent him from Munich. He rose with the Party. When I first met him at Werner's store, he already wore the swastika of a party member and proudly displayed his credentials. Soon he divorced his Greek wife and married a German governess or nursemaid, in accordance with Rosenberg's preachment against defiling "German blood".

He talked badly, in an emotional, theatrical style, but with great self-confidence. He had an atrocious Bavarian accent. Dr. Eisenlohr, the German envoy, once exclaimed, "Another speech from that loquacious and boorish peasant! *Mon Dieu*, if only he might disappear from Athens! Then we could breathe again". From the moment of the first Nazi triumphs he began spying, sending back to his Party headquarters reports of activities at the German Embassy, the German school, and the Consulate. His tirades, his dress, and his gestures recalled the Führer's, even to the Hitlerish moustache. In 1929 he held at his place the first brown-shirt meetings in Greece, attended by some employees and representatives of German firms, two or three German hikers, the mechanic, König; the printer, Klapproth; and the bookbinder, Hessner.

I knew the sordid truth about the Party, and knew where and how to direct my attacks upon it. Also I had friends at the Embassy and among the Greek authorities. Several times I succeeded in preventing Kudorfer's use of the Philadelphia Club for his assemblies. A friend of mine, Trikoupis, connected with the Ministry of the Interior, often forbade Nazi meetings in public places.

I openly attacked Kudorfer in my paper. I knew about his personal life, and had a copy of the Ministry of Justice proceedings which had led to his being ordered to leave the country on account of misdemeanours. When Kudorfer, with the help of a handful of Greek sympathizers, launched an anti-Semitic campaign, I published the Ministry of Justice proceedings in



my paper. By mobilizing the German community and Greek anti-Nazis, I was able to frustrate him; the campaign was stopped in mid-career.

Towards the end of January, 1932, I decided to go to Paris, where my mother and young brother George had been living since the early part of 1931. Mother had recovered from her illness; and now that I had arrived at a certain position in the world, I wished to renew my connection with the family. I took this occasion to visit Geneva, where a session of the Disarmament Conference was to begin in February.

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## *CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT*

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SINCE MORNING I had been scouring the streets of Geneva to find a lodging. Finally I secured a small comfortless room for six francs a day. The Conference was in the flood tide of opening. Almost a thousand delegates had for weeks been over-running the quiet city. Flags of fifty-four nations were flying. Hundreds of well-paid journalists had come here to reap the intellectual harvest. Their papers breathlessly awaited the decisions of Siam and the Republic of Honduras. Haitian delegates would cast votes affecting the fate of Central Europe.

It was February third. General debate was to begin that day. The air was light, the spectacle exciting. The League of Nations was playing with the fate of the world. Here, in supreme deliberation, was to be formulated the solemn commitment of millions of men. Would their actions be in the spirit of that clause in the Treaty of Versailles which indicated that German disarmament was to be only a prelude to disarmament by the victor nations?

At the moment when Mr. Henderson was calling the plenary session to order, the Japanese fleet was concentrating upon Shanghai the fiercest artillery barrage since the 1918 armistice. The newspapers reported a hundred outrages in the



Far East. But of course the Orient seemed a safe distance from Geneva. Nevertheless the ruin and suffering of millions of Chinese was—awkward. The cold cynicism of these massacres of the innocent put a crimp in the professions of general amity, and tainted the superior ozone.

At one side two Germans were talking gutturally, “*Ja*, the I. G. Farben . . . the new torpedoes . . . magnificent! Japanese . . . remarkable race!”

Men with heavy paunches, slim diplomats in smart Bond Street attire moved in and out of the crowd, their arms filled with portfolios. A Hindu and a Lithuanian entered, deep in a discussion of Versailles and its consequences. Several delegates were drawing caricatures of those present; others were making lists of appointments; someone else was totalling a household account. Dry, bustling women exchanged greetings in passing; representatives of religious sects, cultural associations, fashion sheets and societies for the protection of dumb animals. All so busy!

“By the way, what do you think of Hitler?” asked an Englishwoman of her companion, an intense girl in horn-rimmed spectacles. “Isn’t he absurd!”

“Why is it absurd to have a German Chancellor who will protect the civilized world against Moscow? You know my fashion editor, the Countess O——. She tells such horrible things that happened to her in Russia!”

I thought of the clenched jaws of the Nazi youth bearing torches; nights in Berlin; the hunger marches; Goebbels beating the table of the Sportpalast with his fist. . . .

Then the farce began.

A disarmament conference? Disarmament, when the hall teemed with the agents of munition makers and munition dealers? And for a counterweight, well-meaning folk would say to one, “But surely among our leaders, our delegates and statesmen, there are some who desire world peace!”

I was disgusted at their credulity and want of logic, seeing it in terms of the heartbreak that, day after day, was being stored up for millions of people in the not too remote future. No doubt the small capitalists, the persons interested in Nestlé stock or Chanel perfumes, might practise some brand of sincerity and might even care for world peace. But the merchants whose power was represented at the Conference were the men from the cartels and other “limited liabilities” of international scope. It was they who were manipulating public opinion, co-ordinating the activities of press, theatres,



cinemas, radio, munitions plants and rubber plantations. This was a new internationalism, the internationalism of the most reactionary, chauvinistic, imperialistic sections of capital.

The benches filled up and the press gallery was crowded. Confused sounds mounted from the floor as the delegations found their places. Delegates, secretaries, visitors jostled one another. A colleague pointed out to me a former Socialist-Labour deputy now old and bald, a senator prolonging his handshake.

The session began. Silence fell. I had the sensation of being in a morgue: the place was still, the odour of corruption manifest. My impulse was to leave, to go out and talk with healthy people—perhaps the chauffeurs mounting guard over valuable limousines. A speaker was telling the audience of the number of letters, telegrams and testimonials received, expressing the hopes of the peoples of the world that the conference might be successful. Words dropped—"co-operative alliances . . . workers . . . liberties" into an abyss of air. The bald men bent over their dossiers, making neat little notes with their gold fountain pens. Two gentlemen with rosettes of the Legion of Honour put their heads together in a manner appropriate to personal scandal or scabrous anecdotes. Then one shook his head in feigned incredulity. There was an ironic smile on the lips of the correspondent of Moscow's *Izvestia*, not too difficult to interpret. He was probably thinking, while all these people wasted time here, of the thirteen million Nazis with their marching Storm Troops, crashing bands and flying swastikas; for the murderous battle for Germany went on day by day, regardless of congratulatory telegrams read at Geneva. Now an old Socialist and friend of Briand was droning on, invoking rhetorically the "intellectuals of France, men and women of the United States, syndicalists of Holland . . . millions of families, entire nations . . . all demanding a policy of disarmament!"

The senator was still bending over the Socialist-Labour Deputy. I closed my eyes for a moment. I saw old visions and heard old refrains: "Rise, sit, lie down, rise . . ." a hundred and fifty, three hundred times. "Deutschland über Alles"—"Death to Democracy, Germany Arise!" The speeches went on for hours. The correspondent of the *Wiener Tageblatt* was listening attentively, making notes with his left hand, spectacles ill-adjusted on an enormous nose. Mr. H— of the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* whispered something to his secretary, a lovely, brown-haired girl with a nice figure. My mind strayed to the



fantasy of being with her somewhere in a cleaner atmosphere, of running through meadows, picking flowers, bathing in a crystal stream far away from that dreary building. Were there such things still left in a world where all seemed overlaid by the blight of hypocrisy?

I was full of emotion as my train approached Paris. I had been very young in France, although I wouldn't admit it at the time; I had loved and hated the *Ville Lumière*. Now I was returning, and perhaps everything I had disliked would seem different, no longer full of disillusionment. And what would my reunion with my mother and Uncle Spiridon be like?

I had heard through occasional letters from my aunt that circumstances had forced Mother to lead a new life. After recovering from the Vienna operation, she was penniless, and had taken a job travelling with a second-rate opera company; the voice which once enchanted her guests now brought in a meagre income. She had never worked before, poor Mother; I could hardly imagine her carrying her own bags from hotel to station, travelling from city to city. . . . Yes, Mother must have changed!

For that matter, so had I. It had been a long road of misery to my first success. I was determined not to mention anything of the years of chaos in Berlin and Paris, my associations with Berlin workers, the police brutalities I had undergone in Poland, Italy and Germany; my life as a bootblack, industrial worker, student, seaman's organizer, conscript soldier, taxi-driver, and valet. Now all this was behind me. I would return to Paris, after years of struggle, a self-made man: owner of a large news-distributing agency in the Balkans, proprietor of a prosperous bookshop, a working newspaperman. It would be pleasant to greet my relatives, who, from the first, had contended I would turn out badly.

How long would the red carpet of prosperity unroll before me? I knew clouds were gathering on the political horizon, but in the spring of 1932 I was still optimistic enough to believe the storm wouldn't touch me. I had a silly feeling that life owed me recompense for my misfortunes.

With such thoughts I approached the Gare de Lyon. . . .

Mother was giving a performance when I arrived in Paris, so it was Uncle Spiridon who met me at the train. I was pleased to see that he was quite unchanged. Perhaps a bit older; his clothes not so dapper as I had once thought them.



He greeted me with the utmost affection, and soon we were sitting over *cafés-crèmes* with *brioche*s in a little sidewalk restaurant just as in the old days.

I stayed in Paris for some weeks, growing acquainted with my family again. My brother had grown up to be a fine-looking lad of sixteen, and my mother was much changed for the better. The natural feeling of affection we must have had for each other, which had been clouded by circumstance and misunderstanding, now came to the fore. By the time I left Paris to return to my work in Greece, I had resolved to take care of my mother and brother in future years.

Mother came to the station to bid me good-bye. I was touched; it was the first time anyone had taken me to the train and seemed sorry to see me leave. She stood at the steps of the *wagon-lit* and I looked down at her, into the face that had passed over my boyhood with such petulant indifference. It is true that Mother now appeared somewhat tired and elderly; but her eyes were as beautiful and blue as ever, and in them I could recognize a warmth, perhaps a repentance, hidden for years from me. Transfigured by this new expression, her face was humane and understanding, lovelier than it had ever been before.

We stood there silently for a while. Then, "God keep you, Mother dear!" I said softly.

The tears welled up in my mother's eyes. She slowly turned her head and walked away.

Such was our reconciliation, after nearly ten years.

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## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

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I WAS FAR from being finished with Kudorfer.

Sitting before the portable typewriter in my tiny newspaper office, surrounded by empty coffee cups, I was thinking of my leading article for the next issue of the *Griechische Post*. It was a few weeks after I had returned to Athens from Paris.

A myriad sounds came up from the narrow street. The



drapery store was having a sale. A grape merchant with his laden mule was loudly refusing to make way for a car that could barely get through the throng in the street: pushcart vendors, innumerable Occidental and Oriental pedestrians, not to mention livestock and bales of merchandise. The life of the capital pulsed in these little streets; indeed, the life of the whole Balkan peninsula.

Newspapers, political speeches, folders, clippings, details of the national budget lay heaped before me on the table. I was correcting proofs for a special issue of the paper which was to feature Brüning's speech with the heading, "Whither Germany?" The article had come from the Embassy press attaché, with a letter of endorsement from the Ambassador, couched in friendly and familiar terms.

There was a discreet knock at the door.

I shouted, "Come in!"

It was Kudorfer's voice behind me.

"You here!" I exclaimed, less astonished.

"Heil Hitler," said Kudorfer, politely.

"Well," I said, "what can I do for you?"

Kudorfer was wearing a light grey suit. On his lapel were half a dozen swastikas, emblems of the *Arbeitsfront* and military decorations. His ugly face executed a smile. Had I received his letter? From a yellow portfolio he produced a copy headed with the swastika.

I had indeed received his note, and it lay that moment in my wastebasket, but I took the paper from him and perused it soberly. "Well?" I asked.

Kudorfer's voice grew stronger than ever, and he tried to put feeling into it. He began by speaking of his duty as agent in Greece of the N.S.D.A.P., as Bohle's and Wagner's personal emissary. He was asking me if I would turn my paper into a National Socialist organ, taking orders directly from Herr Bohle at Hamburg.

This was a big opportunity for a young, clever, enterprising young man like me—said Kudorfer. I might become general agent for the *Franz Eher Verlag*, correspondent for the *Völkischer Beobachter*, or even Dr. Goebbels' *Angriff*!

"You're just the man we need. You know the Balkans and you know our organization. Work for the New Germany as you are working now for the Weimar Republic! The Party will spare no expense."

He repeated this several times, so that I should not miss the point, and lit a cheap cigar. He spread out endless documents



with the official Nazi stamp, showing me correspondence with Herr Max Amann of the *Franz Eher Verlag*.

I was curious about the price Herr Kudorfer put on my services. His offer was a thousand marks monthly subsidy for the paper, and three hundred marks a month for me to be correspondent for the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Meanwhile he dropped hints that Germany's new Chancellor was sure to be Hitler and that the new Ambassador to Greece was likely to be—himself.

I was nauseated by his proposal, his lashless black eyes, plump cheeks, cropped hair and reeking cigar. I remembered the pleasant feel of the taxicab crank, with which I had once wrought havoc among Brownshirts in Hauptstrasse.

"We know that you are in the enemy camp," Kudorfer continued. "But you're betting on the wrong horse, my dear fellow. The New Germany needs friends abroad. The Balkans are our first anxiety. German industry needs markets, always markets . . . British competition . . . *Gott strafe England!*"

He launched into the familiar diatribes in bad German, to which I had been liberally treated at the Philadelphia Club. After I had rejected his proposals, Kudorfer left with a click of heels, an arm salute, and the "Heil Hitler."

"*Adieu!*" I replied, exhausted by his flow of words.

I was backing the wrong horse, was I?

There was never a wronger horse than the one Kudorfer had come to offer, nor was the wrongness of any horse ever clearer to me.

In Germany, as well as Greece, the days of January-February, 1933, were eventful. On January 30th, Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich; and on February 28th, following the *Reichstagsbrand*, the White Terror began. In Greece, the year 1932 had witnessed a grave financial and political crisis. Venizelos resigned. The Popular Party leader, P. Tsaldaris, formed a cabinet which in its turn fell in January, 1933. A brief, troubled time followed, with a temporary return to power of Venizelos.

In these troubled February days I had an unexpected visitor—my old friend and protector, Captain Karavillis. Since Kondylis had become Minister of War and the Popular Party had grown stronger, Karavillis had been put in charge of an infantry company in Athens. His sudden appearance, because of his habitual flair for Balkan politics, presaged important political events in Greece.



To put it briefly, he proposed that I join Tsaldaris's Popular Party, in which the captain and his friends were representing the strong Kondylis faction. The backing of this important Greek political group, Karavillis assured me, would certainly strengthen my position in dealing with the Nazis.

Accordingly, during the whole of February, 1933, Karavillis and I were on a political tour through Greece, preparing for the March elections. I handled publicity for the Kondylis party and public relations with the foreign press. This trip round the country gave me an insight into local Greek politics that was both fresh and disheartening. The primitive political sense of the Greek peasants, their acceptance of graft and misrule as unavoidable commonplaces, made me doubt that they would ever achieve democracy by themselves.

Election time found me in the provincial town of Agrinion. About noon all the houses in the town closed their shutters and lowered their blinds. Already the market-place was deserted. The peasants lay in stupor behind the glossy tomatoes, heaps of cucumbers and greenish shaddocks. A few vendors were sorting the vegetables in piles. A very wrinkled old man, in torn trousers and barefooted, was balancing on his shoulders paniers filled with fish. Next him a heavy-set youth was swinging a whip over his head. "*Ade, ade!*" He tugged at his mule's bridle. In the open air before the little café they were melting fat in huge iron skillets for frying fish. It was noon. The sun was high. Garments, parcels, and sacks were spread pell-mell on the sidewalk facing our hotel.

You stepped from rock to rock in crossing the street as though it were a brook, for the pavements were very high and the roadways were filthy, irresistible to dogs who prowled and fought savagely over such treasures as a scrap of mutton bone. The midday heat had grown oppressive in the streets, which were narrow and canyon-like, as are all streets in provincial Greece, so that one saw the sky overhead as a mere ribbon of intense blue and raw white, the colours of Hellas.

The elections were beginning the next day. With me were my friend Stamatiadis, Vourzoulis, a Tsaldaris party candidate, and the Mayor of the city. We had come from Preveza, having already covered Trikkala, Kalabaka, Kerosovo, Lamia and Arta. Our old Buick, driven by a ringletted daredevil, sped through town after town. The elections were expected to be decisive for the Tsaldaris Popular Party. The Venizelists had not much to hope for in that part of the country. I was working for the Kondylis fusion candidate for deputy, Stamatiadis, and



at the same time was sending articles on Greek provincial life to German, French, Austrian and Czech papers.

The campaigning, as in all elections, was done with hard cash. The local clergy were paid and the city officials were squared. The peasants were assured that the Agricultural Bank would pay for their harvests if the Tsaldaris-Kondylis group won. In the dilapidated *xenodochion*\* we were served *pilaf* with fricasséed mutton, black coffee and *gliko*. People came in one after another to see Stamatiadis, calling him Jorgos and using the familiar pronoun. They entered complaints and made petitions. Some women, sallow-skinned, velvet-eyed, and veiled in materials much too heavy for so hot a day, stood waiting. They appeared indolent and unconcerned, for elections were men's affairs.

"Jorgos," said a small, bent and wrinkled peasant, with two goats in a tether, "at home we don't eat till we're full or drink till we're quenched. The soil is very barren and rocky."

The people between Agrinion and Prevesa are as tough and dry as their soil. Descendants of twenty obscure racial strains, they cling to the ocean shore and the mountains that line it, fishing to eke out their lean crops. They are slow, patient, tenacious. Many emigrate to America. The richest man at Agrinion has returned from Iowa, built a new church and become a municipal councillor. He now sat in the café in lordly isolation, fingering a handsome rosary and flicking a lazy hand at the flies. Before the church were some mendicants, but it was too hot to beg, apart from its being superfluous at election time, when Greek liberty and democracy are expressed in handouts. In front of the hotel two old beggars were sharing a piece of *halvah* and a bit of bread, their heads in the shade, their feet in the sun. They grinned in happy expectation of eating a bit of meat soon, for each would get fifty drachmas for making his crosses on a bit of paper.

To-morrow Jorgos would be blessed at the church, and then there would be the parade and all the carnival of an election. Elections in Greece are an empty gesture. The party wins that distributes the most money to individual voters; there is little need for speeches or press propaganda. This does not mean that politics are not taken seriously. They are taken seriously as a trade. No nation in the world has a higher political pulse than Greece.

As they toyed with their beads, the unshaven men discussed politics for hours while the waiter served endless coffees and

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\* Hotel.



*glikos*. All their cousins and in-laws were enmeshed in politics throughout the peninsula. If the Tsaldaris party were to win, new men would replace all the officials and employees down to the smallest sinecure holders. Their opponents, the Venizelists, would fight hard for their daily bread. There was plenty of agitation with meetings and parades. One seemed always to be on the verge of a *coup d'état* or an insurrection. And now Agrinion had the fever.

Towards evening barrels of *retsina*\* appeared in the narrow streets. The fête began. Guitars were brought out. Dancing started. Red handkerchiefs were drawn out and men faced each other in pairs, each holding the handkerchief by a corner, twirling under it and performing ingenious evolutions. Fingers snapped. Here energy was more important than grace. Intricate steps and figures were executed. The dancing was artificial, but infectious, and other couples joined in, till there was a ring of twenty men. The music was monotonous, with a hypnotic recurrence of a certain rhythm. Even the gay notes had a certain influx of sorrow. The dancers went on to exhaustion, automatons making frenzied efforts to cast off the centuries-old tyranny of the Turkish janissaries. The robots tried to come alive: sweat broke out on their faces and streamed down their brown shoulders. From time to time a couple would become animated, egged on by the cries of the others, and would gyrate madly till they were wringing wet and their faces shone purple.

At length Deputy Stamatiadis leapt into the circle, his neck swelling. He gripped a red handkerchief and began his calisthenics. Jorgos was one of their own.

By midnight all were drunk and embracing one another. The women had set their shutters ajar and looked on. The priests mingled familiarly with the crowd. One of them, his breath heavy with wine, questioned me about foreign lands as we gobbled lamb.

"You know how it is abroad. Tell us, do they have *retsina*, too, in France? Ah, Christians! Who else lives as we Romainos† do, and keep to the true religion? *Ade Christiane!*" he kept mumbling, patting my shoulder.

The "true" religion reaped good harvests in this region, famous for its curious rites and superstitious survivals. I need hardly point out that elections of the character described had little connection with the promotion of reform candidates or

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\* Greek resin wine.

† Popular expression for natives,



the restraint of political corruption. Corruption seemed to be the one merit in a government, since it provided the means for these electoral binges.

The elections of March 5, 1933, gave the Popular Party of Tsaldaris 135 seats and the Venizelists 111. When it became definitely known on the morning of March 6th that the general elections had gone against the Venizelist Republican National Union, General Plastiras, on the pretext that there was no chance of a stable national government, proclaimed a dictatorship and martial law. He arrested Tsaldaris and cleared the Athens streets with a couple of antiquated armoured cars and machine guns.

His triumph lasted exactly fourteen hours. On March 8th, by popular demand and military pressure from Kondylis adherents, Tsaldaris took up office and formed his cabinet in a constitutional way. Leaders of the *coup d'état* were arrested, with the exception of General Plastiras, who succeeded in escaping.

Although much depressed by the January and February events in the Reich, I was heartened by Captain Karavillis' support. My position in Greece was materially strengthened by the Popular Party victory which I had helped to win. It was also a personal victory over Kudorfer, who would have preferred anything to my association with the powerful Tsaldaris group, not to mention the Kondylis military clique. Through this political manoeuvre, my support of Greek conservatives, I spiked his charge that I was "red". This deferred the *Gleichschaltung* proceedings for a while—the complete German ownership and Nazification of all business firms at home or abroad.

In my fight against the Nazi faction in Athens, I had won the first round. But there were many more to come.



## PART SEVEN

# SPARKS FROM THE REICHSTAG FIRE

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## CHAPTER FIFTY

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THE SIMPLON EXPRESS roared through the darkness, taking me to the country that had once pushed me out on a cold February day—Germany. Memories came back to me. Winter in Hamburg: the smoking chimneys, the docks, the balked desires and long wanderings—and then a turning point. Financially I was in better circumstances, able to help out my family. Werner had left Greece for the Soviet Union three months after the Nazis had taken over Germany, leaving me the sole owner of the *Deutsche Buchhandlung*, the *Internationale Zeitungs-agentur*, and the representative of various publishing interests. He had impressed upon me that it was my duty to continue working against fascism, covertly if need be. The starting place of this effort must be retaining the business which was my major source of influence.

Thus, on that June day in 1934, I was on my way to Munich, intending to visit the famous Braunhaus, and remonstrate with Herr Wagner, head of the Foreign Department of the N.S.D.A.P., and his clique. I was going to make clear to Wagner that his Gauleiter, Kudorfer, was going too far, and that methods applied in a domestic revolution were quite inappropriate at a foreign capital. In my pocket were letters of recommendation from the German Embassy at Athens, outlining my usefulness to them in the past (I had been careful not to break off contact with the "Weimar democrats" who at this date still remained in some Embassy jobs), and mentioning my strong connections with the Tsaldaris-Kondylis Popular Party, the dominant political force in Greece. These documents, together with my status as representative of the



*Frankfurter Zeitung*, Germany's most liberal paper, which at this date still retained some of its old editors and had kept up cultural standards which the rest of the German press had abandoned long ago, as agent for the firm of Knorr and Hirth, the Ullstein publications, which were now in the process of being incorporated into the *Franz Eher Verlag*, and my connection with the *Münchener Illustrierte* and the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, would, I hoped, procure me a not unfriendly hearing in Munich and Berlin. The trip was the only means I might have of saving my German newspaper agencies, since most of them were already in the process of *Gleichschaltung*, or absorption by the Nazis, and would soon fall into the hands of the N.S.D.A.P., which is to say Kuderfer.

From the moment one crossed the frontier of Germany, one encountered glances of hate and hostility from fellow passengers. The official at the border took my passport politely and correctly enough, but looked at it sharply. I had retained pictures of Bavaria as it had been in the days of my stepfather's moving-picture exploits and my excursions, with a rucksack, whistling Tyrolese airs through the tranquil villages of the Republic, whose citizens puffed at big pipes and spoke with guttural accents. But now there were swastikas everywhere, stuck up on façades, pinned to conductors' uniforms, stuck in lapels, and files of men in uniform, carrying swastika banners, were entering and leaving the train. All these SA and SS men now clicked heels and saluted punctiliously; they were no longer the beardless rowdies of the late twenties, but a group of disciplined men with stern faces and firm jaws.

My passport was several times verified; on each occasion I had to show my press card and military photograph. Military status was honoured here, even though it might be in a foreign army, with respectful heel-clicks and salutes. When two men with Semitic features came into the compartment, some young Germans signalled them to leave. They apologized for the entrance of the "Juden", alleging that what with excess of work the leaders of the Third Reich had not yet developed an adequate system of preventing the intrusion of Jews on travellers from abroad. Herr Streicher would fix all that ~~soon~~, I was told.

Germany was amazingly altered. At the station I was met by two men in civilian clothes, who presented themselves as Herr Hermann Eberle and Herr Hans von Längercke; they appeared mysteriously to combine the functions of representatives of the German press, Gestapo agents, and secretaries to



Wagner at the Braunhaus. They took dinner with me at the hotel and asked thousands of questions about Greece and the German colony. Afterwards they drove me in their little Wanderer adorned with an official flag to the historic Bürgerbrau where the Führer had made his abortive Putsch in 1923; they pointed out tables where He had sat, with a hushed serenity as though we were viewing ancient sepulchres in a cathedral. We had a good deal to drink and some women joined us. All were singing Nazi songs. Suddenly two men in SA uniforms got up and came over to ask my companions some questions as to my origin. They viewed me with suspicion; my dark hair and well-made clothes betrayed me as a foreigner, possibly a Jew. My companions displayed their credentials and the SA's clicked their heels and departed. Conversation turned to the new "German order", and the "protective custody" of the concentration camp. I was no less curious than my companions and asked if I might not manage, as correspondent of Balkan newspapers, to visit Dachau.

"Ah, why should you want to see those swine there?" They exchanged glances, laughed and lifted their glasses. "The Marxist pigs and the Jews—they fix them up right."

Next morning a civilian and two young assault troopers dressed in impeccable black uniforms called for me in a convertible Mercedes and drove me at breakneck speed through the streets of Munich. The troopers pushed pedestrians arrogantly aside when we drew up before the famous Braunhaus, brain and heart of the National Socialist Party. The whole façade of the sombre building was flag-draped in the morning sun. Before me opened for an instant a stretch of empty pavement. I passed between two ranks of men in brown shirts. Some curious bystanders stopped and stared at us. Orders rang out. Herr von Längercke led me to an immense stair decorated with flags; at the top was a gilded spread eagle with the swastika emblem beneath. More Brown-shirts stood at attention and saluted. Herr von Längercke returned the salute negligently.

My escort led me through corridors and across apartments marked "*Reichsleitung der NSDAP*" till we came to a rank of offices on the second floor with doors labelled "Argentina", "Bulgaria", "Honduras", "Brazil", etc. This was the famous foreign department of the N.S.D.A.P., created at the instance of Hess and directed by Bohle at Hamburg and by Wagner at Munich. In one of these offices Regierungsrat Rauch was conducting Greek affairs. Somewhat to my dismay, I dis-



covered that he had spread about him all my articles, which had never been favourable to the Nazi regime; they were clipped and pasted on yellow sheets and red- and blue-pencilled. There were the pieces from the *Griechische Post*, the pieces sent to Ullstein, those printed in *Proia* and the *Messenger d'Athènes*, and those supplied to the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*. They seemed to have missed the articles I had written for the *Welt am Abend*, or at least they were not shown to me. There were also prints of photographs showing me with Professor Caro and Dr. Wrede of the Archeological Institute at receptions at the German School, not to mention a few trivial but rather personal snapshots taken of me in the company of some German governess. I complimented the Regierungsrat on the thoroughness of his services.

On the walls hung maps showing Attica, Crete, Naxos, Mytilene and the Thracian border; and the harbour of Salonika in detail.

The largest map of all had pins stuck in it to show the exact distribution of German sympathizers in Greece. The black heads indicated Nazi party members, the white stood for German sympathizers, the blue for Greek sympathizers, and the red for persons to be won over. The German restaurant in the Rue Patission, owned by a big sandy-haired Viennese, and a Greek tavern in the Omonia patronized by Germans were marked in black. Around the German school was a black circle indicating perfect submission. The Kegel Club, the Turnverein, the Hellen-German Society and the Archeological Institute, however, were marked in white. Poor Professor Caro and his trembling archeologists! Detailed maps of the city showed the Athens Nazi Party Headquarters, from which radiated a diffusion of detail covering the whole Greek peninsula, indicating every kiosk where German papers were sold, with special attention to purchases and subscriptions to the *Völkischer Beobachter* and *Der Angriff*. I was amazed at these details. Around the German Book Store was a red circle, and the *Griechische Post* was also marked in red. I was there to be won over.

After a few formalities, the Regierungsrat led me to the adjacent office. The stage setting of the room was overwhelming to a simple Balkan newspaperman. Swastika flags covered the walls; jars filled with chrysanthemums of all varieties and shades were placed at the entrance and flanked an enormous portrait of the Führer. From behind a table garnished with white chrysanthemums in Swedish faience vases, a man in a



brown shirt stared at me with cold eyes. Wagner was still young. His chin was clean-shaven and energetic; his gestures were brusque as he motioned me to be seated. Behind me the Regierungsrat and Herr von Längercke waited stiffly, armed with documents.

"I expected you yesterday," were Wagner's first words.

He asked me to explain my attitude towards the National Socialist Party at Athens, towards Kudorfer, and to the ideas of the Third Reich. Herr Bohle's section at Hamburg had complained about my unsympathetic attitude. As the *Gleichschaltung* process was really a question for Hamburg, he would not have meddled with it except for representations from the German Foreign Office and from the *Franz Eher Verlag*. Naturally, from the N.S.D.A.P. point of view, it was out of the question that I should continue representing German publishing houses in a nation as important as Greece. Kudorfer was much better equipped to convey to the Greek nation the spirit of the Third Reich. My services to Germany before the Nationalist Revolution did not excuse my refusal to commit my paper to the Party.

"Germany is the Party, and the Party is Germany," repeated Wagner impressively. "Mein Herr, you should understand that."

He had put me on the defensive. I said that my purpose as newspaperman and editor was to develop a certain thesis about Germanism and Hellenism, that I was trying to treat the question historically and philosophically, and preferred lending my paper to writing of a distinctly literary character, such as might create sympathy and understanding between Germans and Greeks, and bring the two nations together in a friendly, pacific spirit. As to the distribution of the German press, I explained that I had stuck to strict neutrality in the face of remonstrances made to the Greek Ministry of the Interior by the French Embassy. At present the German press in Athens had the best display and distribution of all foreign-language publications. I pointed out that I had influential friends in Athens who would want to see me continue to work in the same spirit of non-partisanship. In the past, both Germany and Greece had suffered from the Venizelos clique's intrigues with Franco-British quarters, I remarked, whereas the rising Tsaldaris-Kondylis Popular Party might serve to improve Greco-German relations.

Such hopes, however, might be frustrated by the excesses of the Nazi zealots in Athens. They were associating with the



worst Greek element, meddling with purely domestic matters and causing intense daily irritation. Mr. Rangabé, Greek Ambassador at Berlin, had notations of all these infractions and had reported them to Herr von Neurath. It was intolerable that a representative of a foreign country like Kudorfer should be mixing in Greek elections, instituting boycotts of Jewish-owned newspaper stands at Salonika and Athens and tearing down displays of newspapers not corresponding to his political views.

In conclusion, I expressed the hope that the recrudescence of German nationalism which we were witnessing and which, though some of its manifestations were considered alien to the Hellenic scene, the Greek nation was endeavouring to understand might not continue to furnish occasion for perpetual agitation centring around Kudorfer and the Philadelphia Club. I implied that the new Germanism might be more acceptable to the Greek spirit if administered in moderate doses rather than all at one gulp. I had tried to speak so as to avoid giving offence and yet stoop to no insincerity.

Herr Wagner had been at some pains to acquaint himself with my record. He knew I controlled the largest news distributing agency in Greece and had refused to remove certain publications from the Athens kiosks, had continued to distribute Prague and Vienna papers of a definitely radical nature, and was on cordial terms with certain known anti-Nazis. Now he was tapping on the table with a pencil and I knew the moment was crucial.

"Your life is in some ways obscure to us," he finally observed. "Born in Russia; a Greek citizen. There is your association with that Communist Werner—what a pity he escaped us, but his wife is in good hands!—but I understand you are definitely separated from him now. . . ."

I tried to switch the conversation to a less dangerous topic by renewing my request to visit the concentration camp at Dachau. This was a definite tactical error. Herr Wagner lost control of his temper and shouted, "You came here to talk business, didn't you? There's no time to waste on those traitors to the Fatherland!"

After a short silence, he continued, "We have a report from the Athens N.S.D.A.P. on your activities in the Greek merchant marine which are rather dubious. I'd like you to explain certain points to the Regierungsrat in writing. Your depositions will be sent to Hamburg and Herr von Längercke will accompany you there. Herr Bohle will be able to determine what the



Third Reich will do about the situation. You may set out this evening. Until these questions are clarified, I suggest that you remain in close touch with Herr von Längercke.

"By the way, I note that we lack the record of your birth and the certificate of Aryan grandparents. You know these documents are essential, even if you represent only non-political German publishing houses. . . . Lost the record in the Revolution? Hm. We'll investigate . . . Heil Hitler."

He rose. We went out through the vast corridors. I was asking myself what the devil I was going to do in this lions' den with *my* ideas, my past, and my present. It was suicide. The mystery of National Socialism had attracted me like a hypnotized rabbit that comes nearer and nearer the snake till the reptile swallows him. Would I be swallowed too?

The same car was waiting below; the same arms were raised and the same heels were clicked. Längercke was no longer smiling. He had his instructions. I was no longer a foreign correspondent on tour, to whom he should display the beauties of the New Germany. From that moment I was the ex-partner of Communist Kurt Werner and his *Deutsche Buchhandlung*—something between a political prisoner and an undesirable alien. My status remained to be defined, after questioning at Hamburg, by the Gestapo.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

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BACK AT the Münchner Hof hotel, I went up to pack my bags, sensing all the folly of this trip and my colossal nerve in venturing into a Germany that I had been attacking daily since the advent of National Socialism. Bohle's dossier on me at Hamburg would doubtless be even more complete than Wagner's. Kudorfer had powerful friends in the Gestapo and close to the Führer himself. And I could not be sure whether the Greek Embassy at Berlin would be strong enough to restrain the German government from throwing me into some



concentration camp or even sending me to the shambles of Plötzensee. After all, I was only a naturalized Greek. And were my Berlin friends as influential as Kudorfer's?

In this turmoil of reflections, in enemy territory, surrounded by fanatics and adventurers who stopped at nothing, I was haunted by Wagner's sinister manner and expressions: "Born in Russia—companion of Communist Werner. We'll investigate." Perhaps I had lent myself too readily to the point of view of the publishers I was representing, the newspaper people and the old Embassy crowd. They read into the Nazi regime some of their own moderation and rationality, seeing it as a means of rehabilitating Germany's domestic and foreign standing, discounting its excesses as fireworks, superficial and temporary. But, after all, my articles were still being accepted by non-Party papers and periodicals. . . .

Here I was, about to set out for Berlin to visit my publishers. But instead of the Kochstrasse, I might well find myself in the hands of Count Helldorf's special contingent in the Alexanderplatz. Thousands of Communist and Socialist leaders had been arrested since the seizure of power. Mass arrests were continuing and the St. Bartholomew's massacre went on day after day.

I paid my bill and was in the act of reading the mail that had come in that morning—which, of course, had been efficiently opened, read, and sealed up again—when something occurred that was a bolt from the blue. I saw a man coming towards me. A black bandage covered part of his face. Suddenly the mists parted and I recognized my old professor of history, Dr. Scholle.

"Panie!"

He pressed my hand lingeringly. Somehow his one eye seemed less hideous. Grey hair covered his temples. He stooped a little, was dressed in black and wore a swastika in his lapel, embossed with a golden eagle, which indicated that he fared high in the Party hierarchy. A young SS man was carrying his bag.

"My dear Panie! You here! Tell me everything quickly."

With the nervous hand I knew so well, he drew me into a beer parlour next to the hotel. Längercke exchanged some words with the man in the black uniform and, persuaded of the superior status of my interlocutor, relaxed in the hotel lobby.

Dr. Scholle had travelled far since the period of our long walks in the Thuringian forests. He was now confidential



secretary to one of Hitler's chosen apostles, Dr. Wilhelm Frick, the man who had put Hitler in the saddle and whose career as reactionary bureaucrat dated back to Wilhelm II's Empire. Frick, a former Munich police official, was now a minister of state and was "cleansing" the administration of all non-Nazi elements and creating a new administrative code. He was also charged with purging the personnel of all the German schools, and for this task had chosen Dr. Scholle, who for ten years had organized sections of the Party in Thuringia.

We talked a long time. Scholle spoke enthusiastically of his chief, a man of unassuming, shy appearance, who lived in a modest apartment in Berlin with his wife and his three children. He also told me that Schultze had incurred Nazi martyrdom.

"Little Schultze, your friend, wasn't he, Panie? Killed by the Marxist swine . . . Böttcher, a group leader at Erfurt . . . distinguished himself cleaning out the radical element after the Reichstag fire . . . Ebbe died as the result of a mismanaged abortion . . . everything just the same at the Pädagogium!"

Dr. Diez had taken Scholle's place. Dr. Scholle said he could help me if I told him frankly just what had happened to me. He evinced much more interest in my "Hellenism" than Wagner had done. He declared he would aid me. I knew I could count on his word. The man had dropped from the sky to save me from an eventual concentration camp.

But when I spoke to him of the letters of introduction I had brought and told him of the influential people I knew, like Gauleiter Ernst, how I carried a letter of introduction from Willie Krause to a certain Friedrich Ströbel at the Braunhaus, who was closely associated with Röhm, Scholle leaned towards me and his eye took on the odd look it used to assume when he talked to me in the corridors of the school about the Fourth Punic War.

"My advice, Panie: keep clear of this Friedrich Ströbel and don't go to see Ernst for the moment! There are things in preparation—that is why I am here. Keep it under your hat. Himmler is bringing in his SS detachments from all the southern districts; I am here on a mission directly from the Ministry of the Interior. . . ."

Indeed, buses and cars were unloading a surprising number of young men in the black uniforms of the picked guard, Himmler's SS. The Münchner Hof was full of SS leaders, group leaders and super-group leaders. Something *was* in the air. But I could pry not another word out of Dr. Scholle and my sixth sense, or flair of the newspaperman, was left unsatisfied.



In the afternoon, my old teacher came in triumph with a letter of introduction to a certain Regierungsrat Borsig in Berlin, who had much influence among persons surrounding the Führer, in particular Rudolf Hess. I would have to go to see this party chief personally. Kudorfer, as Gauleiter in Greece, was responsible to no one save Hess, and he was the man whom I must eventually interview. Not an easy thing, to see the Führer's deputy, Hess. Dr. Scholle was going to write also to some colleagues in the "Aussenamt", asking them to receive me.

I was somewhat reassured, and had evidently risen in Längercke's estimation, for on the train to Berlin he favoured me with insipid anecdotes and some accounts of his amorous adventures, which always seemed to wind up with one or another form of venereal disease. Then he drifted into talk of Rosenberg and the Führer. He swore he would visit Greece at the earliest possible moment, and I had to promise to take him to the finest brothel in Athens.

There were two Englishmen in my compartment, armed with Baedekers and tourist marks. They were quite unconcerned by events, talked of golf at Berlin, trout fishing in the Harz, and hunting in Pomerania. The bloody events, the daily trials and executions, had not affected them. Indeed, they declared that officials had treated them with perfect politeness, that the exchange rate was advantageous, and that the Berlin night clubs sold excellent Scotch. I hardly knew whether to be irritated at Anglo-Saxon imbecility or to admire Anglo-Saxon *sang-froid*. All my companions in the compartment were agreed on one point: that Russia and Bolshevism were detestable.

"Ja, ja," repeated a commercial traveller, offering chocolate to the Englishmen, "Germany and England together must fight Bolshevism."

I reflected that German authorities in Athens had imparted an official tone to my visit in Germany, even going to the length of arranging an interview for me with Dr. Neumüller, the new co-ordinator of Ullstein's foreign department. The Ullstein correspondent, Lambridis, was proving inadequate, deficient in enterprise and ignorant of German. The legation secretary had urged me to talk with Dr. Neumüller, describing him as a man who, himself a journalist, thoroughly understood the situation at Athens and would not let the Party influence the press in Greece. He would see how badly Greco-German relations would be affected by Kudorfer's having control of the



German press in Athens. But by the time I got to Berlin a slight change had occurred. Max Amann had personally taken over the Ullstein foreign department.

Amann had directed the National Socialist publications since the birth of the Party and edited Hitler's, Rosenberg's and Feder's books. He was playing the most important of roles in Hitler's inner circle. He was Hitler's friend and while he had not the power of Goering or Goebbels, he was Hitler's special confidant and adviser. The two had been acquainted from the time of the World War. Amann had been regimental sergeant major of Hitler's regiment. In 1919 they met at Munich. Hitler told Amann of his ideas and ambitions. Amann listened attentively to the inflammatory outpourings. Presently he became the Party administrator and proprietor of the Franz Eher Press, the gigantic brain of the National Socialist organism, the dictator of German publishing and the Führer's counsellor on every question of importance.

From him came the Führer's important decisions. He was playing an immense role in Hitler's personal life. To cap all, he was the publisher of *Mein Kampf* and was sharing with Hitler the revenues from a book whose printings equalled those of the Bible. Amann, in conjunction with Hess, was directing the movement abroad.

Also it was Max Amann who prepared the ground for Goebbels. From his office National Socialism was being disseminated throughout the world. The clubs, the newspapers and German publications thrown on the market in any country where there is a German minority, the subsidies to foreign papers, the secret funds, the literature published in twenty languages—all these were the responsibility of Amann. And then when all was prepared, Dr. Goebbels pressed a button and the machine began to function.

Amann was the only man that neither Goering nor Goebbels could oppose. He was the backstairs man.

From his office had come the proposal that the Franz Eher Press, not the Party, buy the *Griechische Post*, thus preserving the fiction that Germany did not meddle officially in Greek affairs. In that manner the *Türkische Post* of Istanbul had been bought. On my declining the offer, the *Franz Eher Verlag* had set up a rival paper, the *Athener Zeitung*, published by the Quisling brothers Kukuzides with a subsidy but with no circulation.

And now, it appeared, Amann was ready to negotiate. I had firm control of the newsvendors' association and was president of the syndicate of proprietors and distributors of



foreign papers in Greece. Would he make some concessions to win me or make further efforts to break me?

All that afternoon I was calling at newspaper offices. I found none of my friends left at Ullstein's. The Nazi commissar who received me referred me for any information to the *Franz Eher Verlag*, where, in due course but much to my astonishment, I learned that Herr Amann was at Munich. So he did not wish to see me, after all! But, then, on the other hand, there might be other reasons, for I had several intimations of commotion in government circles.

The Kurfürstendamm, animated in Republican days, was virtually empty in the hot sun, except that a vendor of the *Stürmer* was blatantly active. The famous Café Reiman had several times been raided and had ceased to be the resort of the young Kurfürstendamm élite and the artist colony. The immense rotary presses of the *Mosse Verlag* were idle. The *Berliner Tageblatt's* editions were slim. The *Acht-Uhr Abendblatt* was directed by the staff of the *Angriff*. Nazi commissars were purging newspapers of whatever remained of their Leftist or Centrist tendencies.

The newspaper world between Zimmerstrasse and Kochstrasse seemed curiously tranquil in these late June days. Already the humid warmth of the season was apparent. The faces of Berliners were more drawn and tired than when I had last seen them. There were sad smiles and clenched teeth as people fled to avoid meetings and exchanges of the Nazi salute. An atmosphere of oppression prevailed. The capital had lost tempo and self-confidence.

I returned in the evening to my hotel in the fashionable Westen. Some friends were awaiting me. Sitting on the terrace of the Eden Hotel, we talked in lowered tones. Almost all the persons for whom I inquired were away on vacations—extended vacations, I gathered. The *Vossische Zeitung's* foreign editor, a Titan among the nation's journalists, had been for eight months in a concentration camp. Others were abroad. Many had committed suicide. The taking over of the newspaper offices in Kochstrasse was described to me—how the tables were overturned and the staffs hauled away in lorries. Dr. Spengler glanced behind him warily as he described such scenes with his characteristic irony.

The attitude abroad, especially in England and France, was puzzling to these people who for years had observed the foreign situation from their offices. A great blunder was not to have prevented Hitler's accession; a still greater was to have allowed



him to consolidate his power and proceed to rearmament.

The orchestra was tactfully playing German waltzes; even here in this great hotel, patronized by foreigners, the new laws were in effect. Otherwise the hotel was unchanged. Women still sat in the big armchairs awaiting foreigners who would pay twenty marks to visit their rooms. There was an assortment of men in uniform and Anglo-American travellers, of whom many were in Germany that summer.

Leaving my friends at the Eden Hotel, I began walking along the familiar Berlin streets. The Kurfürstendamm—that wide avenue Goebbels called the Fortress of Jewry—livened up in the evening. American movies were still being shown, music poured out from the restaurants, and on the second floor of the Uhlanddeck Café a jazz orchestra was in possession. It was a dance resort strictly reserved for non-Aryans, where Jewish youths still danced and made holiday. While they were dancing, SA's were nailing up the latest issue of the *Stürmer* in the downstairs entrance-way. Nazis pointed and laughed as they passed.

I took a bus to Halensee. It was crowded with silent people. At Halensee the balconies were hung with particoloured paper lanterns and the Berlin night seemed tranquil. A band of Hitler youth went by singing the Wessel song:

*“Wenn Judenblut vom Messer spritz . . .”*

Women were knitting on the balconies. A foreigner would have caught no disturbing signs.

I telephoned the Pension Victoria-Luisen-Platz asking for Wanda's address, only to be told she was in Warsaw. The Polish circle had left, the Baroness had changed residence, and Captain Amerzinski had returned to Thorn. So Wanda was in Warsaw! That was the one city in Europe I tried to avoid. . . .

Such frustrations whetted my inclination to renew old acquaintances. I determined that as soon as my schedule of interviews permitted, I would revisit the workers' quarters of Berlin—in short, Neukölln and Wedding.



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*CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO*

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I WAS GOING to meet Hess in a few minutes, the man Hitler had designated as his heir, the private secretary who exercised so powerful an influence on Hitler's judgment. It was Hess who had appointed Bohle at Hamburg and Wagner at Munich and had persuaded Hitler and Goebbels to create a headquarters at Stuttgart for the immediate mobilization of twenty million Germans living abroad. Kudorfer at Athens was one of his agents and directly responsible to him; Hess had made him and could break him if my arguments impressed him enough.

The interview would be a tough one. I did not know how much of the truth N.S.D.A.P. records contained about me. Hess had received Kudorfer only a few months earlier at the head of an Athenian-Nazi delegation. What were my credentials, after all? Or how much could I depend on the Greek envoy, who was actively giving parties to the cream of the Nazi aristocracy? With a return of misgiving, I mounted the steps of the chancellery, still escorted by Langercke. The higher we climb, I reflected, the farther we have to fall.

In Wilhelmstrasse, grey-uniformed soldiers stood at attention. More corridors and countless doors. There was not the extravagance of the Braunhaus, but everything here was more solid. Field grey dominated; there were no SA's. Civilians and the SS elite were everywhere. Secretaries quietly came and went through the reception room.

A door opened. Beyond was a vast room brightly lighted with crystal chandeliers. The floor was thickly carpeted. I was led to the middle of the room. There was another huge picture of the Fuhrer in a brown shirt and there were more swastika banners. A Nazi eagle was embedded in the wall and I was facing a table with gilded corners and leather chairs. Again there were vases of flowers below the panoplies of flags. This was where Rudolf Hess, party chief and director of the central political committee, received visitors from abroad. Then the man with the iron fist and the mind so keen he could cow Gregor Strasser, came in.



In his brown shirt and boots Rudolf Hess greatly resembled my old school monitor Böttcher. He had straight lips, a firm, cruel chin, thick brows and wavy dark hair. Neither the epithets "grey mouse" nor "Miss Hess" suited him, for he was sturdy and far from being a homosexual as alleged by certain newspapermen on account of his closeness to Hitler (even sharing his bedroom in the early years). Hess was married and, besides, I had once been furnished some testimony by a charming peroxide-blond dancer in an Athens night club with whom he had had a passing affair; she spoke as a connoisseuse.

Hess so far avoided any softness of character that, leaning in the other direction, he delighted in refinements of cruelty. I had heard how in November, 1923, during the famous Bavarian Putsch, he had arrested, with the help of some friends, the Bavarian Prime Minister, Knilling, and Minister of the Interior Dr. Schweyer. He was driving these two men, both rather heavy and one very nearsighted, at high speed towards the Bavarian Alps. All at once he stopped the car, made them get out, had their eyes bandaged, prepared them for execution and in a loud voice gave the order to load. Then he got them back in the car, but repeated the routine at brief intervals, even having shots fired into the air to heighten the sport. On learning the Hitler-Ludendorff putsch had failed, he released them. It was a dress rehearsal for Hess's saturnalia of sadism after the Reichstag fire, when he was especially rabid against German Communists born east of the Vistula.

Now Hess stood before me, a vigorous man in his early forties, next to his massive and ornate table and projected against a fresco of Hitler that took up a whole wall. A secretary had asked me not to take advantage of the great man's courtesy; I should stay no longer than ten minutes.

In a quiet voice and with few words, he began to question me about my impressions of the New Germany, about popular sentiment in Greece, and what was being said in Balkan political circles. He seemed very well informed.

"You return in a few days to Athens?"

I was waiting for that question so that I could start explaining my situation to him.

"Yes, I know," he said. "I've been studying the question of the N.S.D.A.P. at Athens. Some excesses, but Karl Kudorfer, after all, is a faithful man and devoted to the Party. Unfortunately he comes up against the same difficulties as other foreign Gauleiters. They don't seem to understand abroad what is happening in Germany."



He opened on a harangue with gestures and manner of speaking greatly resembling Hitler's. The door opened. A man came in with papers which he laid before Hess. Hess ran through the documents deliberately. An odd silence descended upon us. No phone calls. No movement. A guard stood rigid at the door.

When Hess looked up again, it seemed to me that his brows were knit and his wide mouth had taken on an expression like Böttcher's, in one of his seizures when he would whip the boys.

"My adjutant will communicate directly with the Embassy. Mr. Kudorfer was appointed some days ago special representative of the Reich and the Party at the German Embassy. As for your complaint, Herr Bohle has all the documents in your case. I will send him instructions directly how he shall proceed. That is all I can do for the moment."

He raised his eyes to the ceiling with the calm confidence of one used to controlling events. It had all taken only a few minutes.

"Heil Hitler!"

The audience, brief, and unsuccessful, was concluded. What awaited me at Hamburg, I could provision. Kudorfer's appointment to the Embassy changed many things. I had lost my last prop.

Daniel in the lions' den preserved his equanimity. For my part I experienced qualms, which in retrospect appear moderate rather than excessive. Despite these fears, I visited the workers' quarter. In a dim alley in Neukölln I stood before a sooty building once familiar to me. Gerda had lived here. I climbed the stairs; the carpet was in shreds. A woman was scrubbing the steps.

"Where are you going, young man? There is no one on the fourth floor."

The same answer everywhere. My former acquaintances had vanished. I remembered the address of a Communist-Party member. Yes, Rössel lived near here. I rang. The door opened and an ill-shaven, stammering man questioned me.

"Rössel, Fritz? Not here. Go get his address from the SA."

The door slammed shut. I went and rang at Willi Höfer's. He had been a group leader close to Goebbels. He, too, was away. His brown-shirted younger brother, Hermann, could not tell me where, but his stifled merriment put an idea into my head.

Yes, Willi had gone to Munich. I invited the brother to dine with me at my hotel; he was very much like Willi, only blonder



and heavier-set. It tickled his vanity to dine at the Eden Hotel. He dressed. We took a taxi. At the hotel, after a few glasses, he became more communicative and began explaining to me that events were expected at Munich and that soon there would be an explosion.

"Blood will flow—and how!"

He was clearly afraid to say more, but when I talked to him of his brother and of my interview with Hess, he began to loosen up. There was disturbance in the Party, indeed, at its very heart. Hermann Höfer's brain was not clear enough for its contents to be worth much study. From my own observations, I knew of conflicting tendencies in the party. It had made use of many men who were mere sanguinary brutes, and of others who had been renegade Communists or who were sympathetic with Strasser's "radical" views. The drastic measures which this radical wing of the SA expected were not rearmament and nationalism alone, but a very confused socialization. They resented the ascendancy of the industrialists and Hitler's failure to honour the promises by which he had won their allegiance. This element had been chiefly recruited by Röhm. They were the élite of the SA, veteran fighters who had purged city after city of enemies. They included the rowdiest and most formidable types.

I gathered from Hermann that his brother Willi had linked his fortunes with Röhm's, which surprised me. I remembered Willi as a special idolator of Hitler. Hermann hinted that, while we were sitting on the hotel terrace, SA bands were assembling in the forests and villages; they were armed and awaiting the signal for a thorough clean-up—of the National Socialist Party, of the Arbeitsfront leaders, of the industrialists and the Reichswehr. It would be a stupefying stroke.

But the more he expatiated on developments inside his Sturm local, the harder I found it to believe in any such stroke coming from Captain Röhm, as a thoroughly organized revolt against Goering and big business. Wilhelmstrasse, the powerful armaments industry, and the Reichswehr—this was a powerful combination of forces, all hostile to Röhm's "Socialism", and determined to re-establish Germany among the world's great imperialist powers.

About midnight we went to one of the Russian hangouts which were still open. We had drinks and left. Martin Lutherstrasse was empty and its homosexual and lesbian resorts were closed. Hermann was drunk and babbling about "liberation". Since the Führer had thrown in his lot with the



Thyssens and the Krupps, the men in the SA had lost confidence. They had battled for years to put him in power. And now! There were still the rich; the bankers and the Jews still occupied the aristocratic *Westen*. Hermann stopped by a tree, gagged himself with his fingers, vomited and resumed his conversation. The SA was behind Röhm. "He is our Führer, and Goering, Goebbels and the whole filthy lot will have to answer to us. Either the Führer will do what we wish or—" He drew his hand significantly across his throat.

It was an engaging thought, this idea of the Nazi regime, so short yet so bloody, being terminated after one year! But Röhm's alleged "liberation" gained nothing by being extolled at that hour of the morning in front of a Wittenbergplatz urinal, where the homosexuals, driven from their former resorts, were now holding their rendezvous. I lost my companion, Röhm's disciple; he disappeared suddenly, perhaps with one of the women in red or black lacquered boots who were prowling there, or with one of the very blond and painted youths, often wearing brown shirts and talking of Aryan purges, as they placed their hands on their hips and made gestures of invitation.

I had to suppress a chuckle. I had too clear a notion of what was coming, a shock that would reach through Europe. Many of us who knew the undersides of the Party had been waiting for such a development. As I went home, Hermann's drunken words began to make sense to me. Hitler versus Röhm! What would be the outcome?

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## CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

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LÄNGERCKE BECAME less and less endurable, and kept insisting on my starting for Hamburg. I stalled and tried to gain time, waiting for confirmation from Athens of Kudorfer's promotion and to learn whether he had been installed at the head of the



D.N.B., or German News Bureau, besides becoming Kommissär at the Embassy. I roamed through Berlin. Gerda had left at the end of January, 1933, as I found out by careful investigation. She had gone to Russia. Many former friends were in Copenhagen and Paris. Werner's wife was in a women's concentration camp near Augsburg.

In the last days of June, Mr. Amann's secretary, a very polite young man, informed me that all future relations concerning Greece would be handled by Kudorfer, and that he was representing the German News Bureau and the *Franz Eher Verlag* as well as the Party.

On the morning of July 1st came the news which was such a "shock to morality" in Central Europe, the Party's purge of SA members who were "perverts or homosexuals". The bad boys and criminally disposed *Obergruppenführers*, *Gruppenführers* and *Scharführers*, wrote Goebbels, had been stricken from the ranks of the SA—desperadoes devoid of scruples and capable of every horror, ex-jailbirds convicted of crimes and impostures, who had wormed their way into the Party and risen by Röhm's favour and who had been on the verge of a terrorist coup when the Führer dealt with them personally.

Sitting on the Eden Hotel terrace, I read of the events in Bavaria; three hundred Party leaders, members of the SA, had been slain by Himmler's SS élite guards. The Führer had killed Röhm personally. Goering had dealt with Gauleiter Ernst, whom I had been meaning to see and against whom Dr. Schäfer had cautioned me. My introduction to him seemed to burn in my pocket. The baptism of blood continued till July 4th; Hermann Höfer's brother Willi was among the victims. Goebbels' justification and explanation to the foreign press had, of course, been prepared in advance.

At any rate, the purge offered a splendid chance for me to extricate myself. Neither Amann, Wagner nor Bohle would have any time to devote to the Greek sector. Any further investigations I chose to pursue of the Nazi regime could be more safely continued in Athens. Besides, I wanted to cross the frontier and get out news dispatches on the purge, a topic for the world press. I could already foreshadow the complacent adjustment editorial writers would be making to the shocking news; they would shake their heads briefly and then turn to view the "bright side", making out that with the triumph of "the conservative, the substantial element in Germany" we might look for desirable changes. They would puzzle over whether the June 30th assassinations were mere crimes of



jealousy among Hitler's disciples, or were incidental to intrigues of Himmler in favour of Goering, or were strictly political assassinations. But they would view benevolently the elimination of the Leftist element, for now Goering would be able to prosecute unimpeded his rearmament programme—Goering, who had been able to allay official apprehensions at London and Paris as being "the man who weeds out the extremists and pursues a policy 'not unsympathetic' to the Western powers". Some conservative papers even affirmed that Röhm was a tool of the USSR and that, with him eliminated, Germany would be guided by London and, except for some harmless necessary pogroms, would impede no further a new Anglo-German *entente cordiale*.

I was returning from the outskirts of Berlin, where I had paid a visit to the cemetery where my father was buried. The tree had grown. The cemetery had been enlarged. The bent old caretaker informed me that an elderly lady still came from time to time and brought flowers. Good old Fräulein Achilla! Was it a cult of cemeteries and churches or pure goodness of heart? The world changed, but she remained loyal.

I came through Schöneberg on the way back. Längercke had gone to see relatives at Potsdam and would not return till much later. Our relations were on an odd and inexplicable footing. He had to keep me under surveillance until my arrival at Hamburg and my interview with Bohle, but meanwhile I sought to renew old ties and he amused himself and got drunk.

I had come to a dark beer place, where I used to meet Gerda. The owner was sympathetic to the Communist Party. Now, with sleeves rolled up, he sat before a glass of beer. His business was not doing well or he could not be drinking his own beer at this hour. He remembered me after some explanations. We talked for a time of the past. Everts was an old Social Democrat who had fought in the war, but now he was wearing the swastika stuck in his necktie.

"What does it matter?" he sighed. "Everyone wears it. Otherwise I'd lose the few customers I have left. They smashed my windows twice in 1933."

His wife came in.

"Come here, Mutter. You remember the friend of little Gerda who lived across the way, eh?"

"Why—? Yes, of course. Ach, you here!"

The people who came in seemed to share Everts' opinions. They drank their beers quietly but made ironic comments on



the headlines in the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Otherwise they paid little attention to that sheet, sticking to their *Berliner Tageblatt*.

"The *Blatt* has become a sucking pig of the Nazis," they repeated.

"Ja, we all have our badges for the *Arbeitsfront*," said one of them, wiping his moustache with a sleeve. "It wasn't so hot under Ebert or Brüning—but now that pig of a Ley ruins us with fairy tales, promises, forced labour and *Kraft durch Freude*."

We spoke of Gerda. How far back it seemed! Schlessinger, a young man to whom she had once introduced me, had been executed at Plötzensee; I still recall his spectacled intellectual face and skill at chess. "It is the destiny of the proletariat to save the world!" That observation of his came back to me. He had tossed it out along with other curt phrases one day. A few years later this proposition seemed meaningless. Much had happened since then. The proletariat of Germany was confused and powerless.

Returning to my hotel, I found a warning from Längercke that we must set out for Hamburg to-morrow.

I shall always remember that July day in 1934. The morning was hot. I was walking down Budapesterstrasse towards the Tiergarten. I intended visiting the Greek Embassy in Hildebrandtstrasse to get my post. Newspapers were being hawked. I bought half a dozen papers. I opened the *Völkischer Beobachter* and my world was abruptly blown to pieces. I felt a hollowness down to the pit of my stomach, a sensation of terror I had not known since my childhood, when I was expecting a chastisement. The morning sun was mild and the trees of the Tiergarten were in view. But everything whirled around me.

I could read it in black on white and underscored like all important news from the *Deutsches Nachrichten Bureau*: "Athens Despatch—From the German Embassy at Athens." And then the text. I saw my name linked with Kurt Werner's and his picture, followed by a résumé of his life. The *Völkischer Beobachter* stressed the point that I, Werner's former collaborator, was at that moment in Berlin. . . . Had I come as a spy for Soviet Russia or under orders from the Western democracies? Was I linked with the exiled Communists or was I an agent of Otto Strasser, who was carrying on his machinations against the Reich from Prague? It was a long article sent from Athens and passed by the Embassy's press bureau; and it had



been sent simultaneously to the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the *Lokal-Anzeiger*, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, and to the *Angriff*. It was featured in the four papers and the *Angriff* had my likeness next to Werner's!

The *Angriff* inquired whether "this element hostile to Germany is going to be allowed to operate unchecked" and whether "Wilhelmstrasse has no means of putting a stop to his activities as a spy in the heart of Germany". I recognized the style! Kudorfer's. The worst had occurred.

There were two alternatives; either I might take refuge at the Greek Embassy or get out of Germany at once. To try to meet the charges was ridiculous. I would rot in a concentration camp long before I had any chance to notify anyone in Athens or take any defensive measures. No, I must leave! Luckily I had my passport with me. I was in front of the Czech consulate. A few minutes later I had the Czech transit visa. The first train left in an hour. I telephoned the hotel that I was in conference and would be back by three o'clock.

"Two men have asked where you are and Herr von Längercke is waiting for you, in your room," the porter informed me.

At three I boarded a train to Prague via Dresden. The hours were exceptionally long. I avoided any conversation. As we neared the frontier, an official collected my passport, which would be returned on the platform. That was the moment I dreaded—the final contact with the Gestapo at the border. I must somehow avoid being questioned. My flight would already have been reported.

The door flew open. More heel clicks. The inspector of valuables, bank notes and currency. Speaking a dreadful nasal German and fumbling for words, I explained to this plump and amiable-looking official that I had some marks which I wished to exchange in German territory for pounds. In a marked Saxon accent he explained to me the hundred or more paragraphs of regulations which would make it impossible for me to exchange tourist marks. Minutes passed and I managed to prolong the discussion with him on the platform. By this time the engines had been changed.

"Hurry, hurry," cried the official, "you've still got to have your passport visaed!"

I turned my paper money over to him and received silver marks. The last whistle was blowing and the train was getting in motion. Uttering a confusing hodge-podge of Spanish and Italian words, I snatched my passport from the hands of the



bewildered official and dashed for the train, tossing a "Heil!" over my shoulder.

I had picked on this little frontier station in the hope that the officers there were sub-standard, and so it proved. Some thick wits shouted after me and waved their arms. But a Czech gendarme in a beige uniform had already entered my compartment. Santa Claus, whom he slightly resembled, could not have looked more genial to me. As he asked for my passport I glanced from the window and, looking back, saw an SA detachment coming up to the station on the German side.

"Company, halt!" I heard.

Now the wheels were gaining speed. The last German inspectors dropped off the train with their papers. The doors slammed. Someone was running after the train, making angry gestures . . .

"These German newspapers you've brought!" demanded the Czech gendarme.

I extended to him the *Angriff* with my picture.

"Give me that filth."

He took all the literature of the Third Reich and opened the window. The sheets blew far and wide. "German garbage!"

He spat in the corner—in defiance of a printed notice.

It did my heart good. The infinite happiness of freedom! I laughed with the people in the compartment and bought them chocolate.

We were over the hill and in Czechoslovakia—a free nation, a land of justice, the refuge of many fugitives. My career as representative of German papers appeared to have ended. But at least I was free. Behind lay darkness—the night of the Third Reich, with its concentration camps and terror. I had got away. Never had the hills of Bohemia seemed so beautifully green.



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## CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

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"ON JULY 25TH, 1934, Dr. Engelbert Dollfuss was assassinated in his office at the *Bundeskanzleramt* by the National Socialists Planetta and Holzweber. . . ."

I was spending the end of July in Salzburg when this news broke.

The pious chancellor was slain himself! Dollfuss, the murderer of women and children, the sheller of workers' homes—Dollfuss, who never missed a Mass and who, sitting in church, received information from his Heimwehr!

I was able to talk with the sole witness of the assassination, the old porter at the Chancellery. On the basis of his deposition, I sent the first accurate accounts of the killing to a number of Balkan papers. The porter had seen the Nazis showering Dollfuss with kicks after two shots had been fired into his body.

I attended the funeral they gave the midget chancellor and saw them put him away under marble. Major Fey and Prince Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg were there in their dress uniforms. The Prince was sober that day; the playboy felt the responsibility of Austria's clerical dictatorship on his shoulders. The foreign press extracted a sullen promise from him to fight the Anschluss. The reaction was immediate: twenty per cent more tourist bookings by Franco-British pleasure seekers. The boulevard press of Vienna displayed Starhemberg's promise prominently.

I followed in detail the trial of Planetta and Holzweber. A supreme hypocrisy of the Nazis was the telegram of condolence Adolf Hitler sent to the Austrian government, excoriating the murderers and rejecting the idea of any participation by his government in the "abominable act". This mask was dropped when, on March 13, 1938, after Austria was annexed by the Reich, Planetta's and Holzweber's names were added to the roll of martyrs and champions of National Socialism and their remains were exhumed and placed in the very crypt which,



until Austria's downfall, had sheltered the body of the chancellor they had slain.

Vienna at this time was a pitiful spectacle. A grave crowd loitered through the streets warmed by the July sun. It was no longer the gay Vienna of before the war: it was a mendicant Vienna. In the narrow streets of the second *Bezirk*, between ranks of stores crammed with Parisian luxuries, one met want everywhere, pale, disheartened faces, uplifted hands. Death hung its shadow over the city of Schubert, Strauss waltzes and Schönbrunn. While Molnar's plays had successful runs, and the *Wiener Illustrierte* devoted its front page to pictures of troops hiking in the Tyrol, in the suburbs of the city were frightened women and children, who had been beaten by Dollfuss' men. Democracy, liberalism and socialism had been stamped out; the Anschluss was in full preparation.

Pale, pimply youths talked hopefully of the great day when Austria would become part of the Third Reich. Perhaps then they would have something to eat, somewhere to sleep, become men again. Some of these youths crossed the frontier into Germany to enlist in the Bavarian SA. Others went down the Danube to hunt work in the Balkans. Prince Starhemberg's men paraded happily in their green uniforms. Communists protested against hunger, against the Nazis, against the coming Anschluss and Major Fey's Heimwehr, meanwhile begging the Social Democrats to make a common front with them against the rising fascist tide. But not the working class alone suffered in Austria. Even in the apartments of the petty bourgeoisie, ruined after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, one saw the "To Let" signs familiar to me from post-war Germany. The streets teemed with prostitutes. Chalky phantoms accosted the tourists at street corners. "We are hungry—even a few groschen will help!"

I shall never forget the Austrian misery of those years, the empty, haggard looks and the outstretched hands. There had been unemployment for years. I talked with workers of the *Ottakring* and *Favoriten*, whose circumstances were even worse than those of the German proletariat. Austria was another of the crimes of Versailles; the treaty piled humiliation and hardship on top of the defeat and capped territorial injustice with blind economic policies. Stripped of all her productive land, Austria could only collapse. A nation cannot be fed by a few dollar-carrying tourists spending the winter weeks in the Tyrolean Alps. It was indefensible to have dismembered the Dual Monarchy at Versailles and then to leave the torn limbs to rot.



Worse was still to come for the ancient glory of Vienna the proud. Above the yowling of jazz and the strains of a nostalgic waltz could be heard the clanging threat of the Prussian advance. All hope seemed dead.

I sojourned next in Budapest. Here one saw more hope and expectancy in the faces, for Hungary was suffering less from economic strangulation. But—what interested me more—Budapest was a window from which I might gaze towards my more or less lost battlefield, the Balkan peninsula. Balkan politics begin at Budapest.

I had many times covered the surface of the Balkan peninsula—on the Simplon Orient Express or by motor car; I had skirted its seaboard by water and visited its highlands by mule or afoot. In a newspaper office at Berlin, I had been introduced as “our authority on the Balkans”, and I was proud of the title, for I felt I had earned it. Now I passed in review some impressions—vivid, and varied, seemingly, to the point of incoherence.

There was Yugoslavia; in other words, Slovenia, Croatia, Dalmatia and Montenegro. I remembered the town of Maribor, on the way from Ljubljana—its vineyards, the purple grapes, the freshness of the pines stretching along the Drave. German influence was still strong there, though the Austrian tradition had yielded to Slovene modification. At Zagreb, too, Germanic culture preponderated and the officials of the regime were very susceptible to agitation from Berlin. Merchants travelled to Leipzig to buy their stock and came back with Goebbels’ ideas. The Braunhaus was alert to the importance of that foothold.

At Mostar the minarets and Moslem tombs get on as best they may with the symbols of the cross; neither crescent nor cross has proved to be a talisman against poverty.

At Split, old Roman roads lead to the coast, but the people lean towards their Slavic brothers to the east. Peasants ask one circumspectly about the Soviets and collective farms. Many White Russian officers took refuge here and have since busied themselves, on instructions from Belgrade, with little exposures of radical plots.

Macedonia with her guerrilla patriots and Greece, perpetually a prey to civil wars, were a part of my very life. I need hardly speak of them further, except to remark that agents of the Reich were in every Balkan city as they were in Athens—often naturalized, always fraternizing with the native-born,



busy with political and industrial spying, and taking pictures with their Leicas for Herr Wagner's pre-annexation files.

What general view could one obtain, with regard to a region as complex and chaotic, both domestically and in its international relations, as the Balkans?

The diagnosis was simple. The Balkans were only a reduced and somewhat intensified picture of the whole world with all its antipathies between people differing in politics, language and religion, constantly and systematically being worked upon for private ends. I had seen at Geneva what those ends were and how they were being served. I had seen in a great variety of places at what cost those ends were being promoted. Regardless of the colour of their skins, the common folk had hollow bellies. The arduous conditions were the same, whether for the Moldavian, the Wallachian, or the Thracian peasant; all were one in the misery of their wretched surroundings and circumstances. Science and technique, for all their marvellous progress, were not being applied to alleviate such conditions.

The remedy was simple, too. That is, simple to conceive. As an editor and newspaperman in the Balkans, I had fought for general enlightenment and advocated specifically the development of a Balkan federation. Switzerland, with its three languages and many religions, afforded a precedent—or Brazil—or the United States, where, despite the often conflicting interests of different regions, the Federal government steadily increased in authority—or the USSR, which had risen above geographical divisions and racial and religious diversity by deliberately destroying the economic basis for factional rivalries.

Facing German-dominated Austria on one frontier and the Adriatic Sea with Italy beyond on another, the Balkans were exposed to two powerful enemies eager for their control. France and England were remote and apathetic. They viewed the Balkan nations as convenient counters in a larger imperialist game. England was, of course, solicitous for the Mediterranean bases as safeguarding her communications with India; but one could not expect that motive to produce in the Foreign Office any active zeal for the intrinsic welfare of the Balkan peoples.

On the other hand, if the Balkans, as I advocated, could be welded into a multinational state under a strong, centralized, democratic government, they would, by reason of that circumstance alone, win the protective assistance of the USSR, the one actively interested neighbouring power whose intentions were benevolent and whose foreign policy had been a con-



sistent and vigorous support of democracy all over the world since the 1917 Revolution began. There was no other way for the Balkans to meet the Fascist threat.

But my programme for the Balkans was not capable of adoption at that time, and the results of my crusading were negligible except for goading into action against me the spy services, press, Gestapo and officialdom of reactionary European capitals. When on October 10, 1934, a month after my return to Athens, word came of the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Barthou, it was apparent that the totalitarian penetration of the Balkan peninsula had already begun. These two men had been vital figures in the struggle to form a united peace bloc in the Balkans. Now Berlin and Rome would have a freer hand.

Looking back, I reflected that the most significant fact in my life was that wherever my devious course had led me, I had had encounters with similar rapacious forces. If only in embryo, fascism could be found in every climate, from the near-Arctic to the equatorial. And only one country, the Soviet Union, had yet learnt how to fight against it.

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## CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

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IN MY TALK with Herr Wagner, I had spoken of the rising political star of Greece's leading military figure, General Kondylis. Kondylis, known variously as the "Greek Cromwell" and "Kerannos"—the Thunderbolt—had entered the army as a common soldier and had left in 1905, preferring to engage in Komitadji warfare against the Bulgars. When he was Minister of War, I had frequently seen him enter the Assembly carrying a long whip, which he would lay suggestively on the table in front of him before launching into a report. An army clique of soldier-adventurers had for many years inflamed his rather mediocre mind with the idea of becoming the strong man of Greek politics. With part of the army behind him, especially the subaltern officers, and with the aid of Tsaldaris' Popular



Party, he might easily come to play an important role. Accordingly, a week after I returned to Athens, I asked my friend Karavillis if he would arrange for me to meet him.

The interview occurred at the Ministry of War building in the Odos Panepistimiou. I was feeling a trifle nervous, for Kondylis was my first—and as it was to prove, my last—generalissimo. In subsequent travels in Europe, I encountered military attachés and such fry, but never again the generalissimo of an army. Yet my nervousness might be laid quite as much to the circumstance that I was talking to a former sergeant major. My experience with sergeant majors was wider but not reassuring.

Kondylis liked to bask in publicity, and received me with his best smile. An orderly brought the conventional *glikos* on little plates and glasses of water. The effect of these kind preparations, however, was a little impaired by the general's opening remark.

"Karavillis says you were a refractory soldier, eh?" He looked at the captain. "If I'd been your sergeant major—hem, ahem!"

He used the familiar "thee" form from the start of our conversation. During his pleasantries, I observed how his undersized body brought into exaggerated emphasis his immense head, with the massive nose and thick eyelashes veiling tired red eyes. He looked me straight in the face.

I tried to question him about matters of interest to my papers, such as changes in the army and improvement of the arms. He spoke in brief phrases of a radical alteration in the Greek army. At the mention of aviation, he shook his head.

"Infantry, infantry," he repeated. "That's what counts and will always count."

His whole face had a muscular vigour. His heavy hand toyed with the inkwell as he talked. He was eager that my papers should carry his picture and he gave me an envelope with half a dozen views of him in dress uniform and on horseback. He insisted they should go with the article.

He evinced lively interest in what was happening in Germany. I caught notes of sympathy with the government of the Third Reich. I assured him that the *Wiener Illustrierte* and *Prager Presse* would render a stirring account of his life. Indeed, he demanded this assurance, issuing curt orders between expectorations. He was in a rage with the correspondent of the *Paris Soir*, for having embellished an interview with some touches of ridicule.



"The French have too much irony and wit and are ill advised to apply it to their Balkan friends," he grumbled into his moustache. "I like serious-minded folk . . . Is this fellow serious-minded?" He shot the question at Karavillis while he flicked the inkwell to the edge of the table.

There was a ring and he took up one of the old-fashioned telephones from his table and issued more curt orders. The interview broke off amidst hearty assurances from Karavillis that my aims were of high seriousness. . . .

Kondylis was greatly pleased with the articles about him, which I placed in half a dozen Czech, Austrian, Hungarian and Yugoslav papers. In all my pieces about Balkan politics, I gave special emphasis to the situation in Greece. Kondylis, being little known abroad, was on the lookout for someone to promote his publicity and, though mistrustful at first, he soon developed confidence in me. I became his "philos", or friend, as he put it to Karavillis, and toward the end of 1934, without the least seeking the "honour", I fell into a confidential relationship with him.

Not long after, I was called to confer with a colonel who was his adjutant. The colonel at once caught my interest by a rather baffling intimation that "If this works out all right, it'll be a very big thing!" I recalled what Karavillis had once said about how I might look forward to an important career in Greece—especially "if things were to change". Hitherto the change had been for the worse, as far as my career was concerned; but now I suspected Karavillis' hand was active in my behalf.

The colonel went on to remark on the need of "probing the sentiments and reactions of the foreign colony in Athens". He said: "Events in the Venizelist camp are alarming. Tsaldaris, too, has a feeling that we are heading for catastrophe."

It sounded as though the one advantage of my being let in on the ground floor was that I should be nearer the basement.

As I talked with the colonel, however, I was conscious of officers and orderlies rushing hither and thither and discussing details and dispositions of forces as though on the eve of a campaign. Whatever Venizelos had in store, his opponents clearly had resolved not to take it lying down.

Therefore, when the colonel extended his hand, remarking: "So, you are our man, aren't you?" I did not say no. Nor could I suppress a flicker of excitement when he looked me straight in the eye and said, with impressive seriousness: "Stamatiadis will keep you posted. Hold yourself in readiness"!



Though the colonel's hints had been obscure, I was fortunately in a position to supply some commentary of my own. Ever since foxy old Eleftherios Venizelos, eight times Premier, and even in retirement the strongest political force in Greece, had been taken wounded from his bullet-ridden limousine on June 19, 1933, the Venizelists had been expecting the trial of the political gangster Georgios Karathanasios. However, all the witnesses against prisoner Karathanasios had been terrorized and beaten. When the clamour of the Venizelists became too strong, the government had appointed a new prosecutor who had promised that "justice would be done". The Venizelists, despite this assertion, could not shake off the suspicion that members of the Tsaldaris government had hired the assassin themselves, to get rid of Venizelos and clear the path for the restoration of Greek King George II.

"Venizelos has gone mad!" Karavillis cried one day, coming sweating into my office. "The old *Ruffianos* is starting trouble again!" (Venizelos was called "Ruffianos", or pimp, by his opponents because he used his second wife's \$15,000,000 fortune to finance his political campaigns.)

If sly old Venizelos had decided to resort to civil war because he had lost the last elections, I reflected, he must believe he had a fifty-fifty chance of winning. It was obvious that the contest for power in Greece was soon to be decided on the basis of a Venizelist or anti-Venizelist coup, with stiff fighting in Athens and elsewhere.

It was not very clear what I could do in that contingency. In Greek papers I wrote only on the situation abroad. And my own paper had influence solely among foreigners in Greece. Its policy was to combat official lies, expose corruption in both the Tsaldaris and the Venizelist factions, and in general to voice the protest of the oppressed—matters of little interest in diplomatic or legislative strongholds. I could only await developments, reflecting meanwhile that, as the colonel said, "If it turned out all right, it would be a very big thing".

That was certainly a very big *if*. The Venizelist resources were difficult to appraise but the foxy gentleman with the skull-cap was, at least, subtle. On the other hand, the Kondylis-Tsaldaris Popular Party and anti-Venizelist movement was made up of various factions, any one of which might either stint its co-operation and thus compromise its success or, on the other hand, might conspire, in the event of success, to appropriate all the advantages. For Kondylis there was need to be wary of Tsaldaris and especially of the Royalist John



Metaxas, who, although for years he had only a minority of nine in the parliament, was energetic and crafty. The thing would not turn out "right"—and would not be "big"—for the Kondylis element unless, besides triumphing over Venizelos, Kondylis kept a firm hand on the victory.

Some days after, I was fetched to Stamatiadis' villa, where we spent a whole night bending over a map of Athens. The purpose was to work out a plan of organized action to be put in effect on the instant Venizelos launched his coup. Every night after finishing my newspaper work I went to this villa at Glyfada—a few steps from the elegant Glyfada Club—where, after a substantial dinner, our circle resumed and pushed forward this task. I knew many people who founded great hopes on our movement and believed it would purge Greece of her corrupt politics, relying on General Kondylis' iron hand. The peasants especially appeared to be rallying to support him, regarding him as one of themselves, a man of the people.

I was at my editorial office. It was a Thursday morning late in February, 1935. A tornado seemed to hover over Greece. Everyone had a fevered sense of the charged atmosphere. Demonstrations were occurring in Crete, Macedonia and Thessaly. There was activity in the army and navy.

The telephone rang. Stamatiadis wished me to come to his villa without losing a moment's time. I travelled there at once.

Half a dozen higher officers were assembled there. They looked very grave. The servants had been sent away. A Colonel Drossinis was present, fresh from Salonika and much agitated.

"General Kondylis has sent me to see you," he said. "I represent our group in Macedonia. We have positive information that Plastiras has recrossed the border into Greece and the Venizelists are preparing a putsch. All Tsaldarist sympathizers are under close surveillance. We know that Venizelos is planning to strike the first week of March. The people are behind us, but the Fourth Army Corps, under General Kamenos and Colonel Venturis, is ready to march. The military school in Athens, the Thirty-Fourth Infantry Regiment, and a part of the Evzones Regiment at Ambelokipos are ready to support the action of Venizelos at Athens. We can count on the army corps at Larissa, however. They are fully mobilized."

General Kondylis was eager to know what attitudes would be taken by the embassies and the foreign press in the event of



his making a counter-coup, Colonel Drossinis declared. Karavillis, who was in the general's suite, had suggested that I was the person best qualified to satisfy him with regard to the foreign press, to secure the co-operation of news agencies and bridle the Venizelist press—and that I should be ready to assume these duties when the time came.

I was rather taken aback at this, however, since I was only on the fringe of the movement. But I was conscious that the group surrounding Kondylis did not include persons with foreign experience. The existing bureaucracy was hostile to this officer clique, even those who were anti-Venizelist. Here, then, were my instructions, to take effect when the coup should occur.

Supported by a detachment of troops, I was to take over the Central Post Office and the offices of the *Eleftheros Typos* and *Vima*, place under surveillance the *Genikon Praktorion* offices and the *Eleftheroudakis* establishment in the Platia Syntagmatos, and foreign organizations such as Kudorfer's and the Philadelphia Club. This last was perhaps a needless precaution for, as Venizelos was rated pro-Ally, the Germans in Athens tended to be anti- rather than pro-Venizelists.

All public buildings from the Omonia to the Platia Syntagmatos, including the Albanian and Bulgarian embassies, were to be under the surveillance of the special police, who had orders to communicate with me and, if need be, to let me interrogate persons presenting correspondents' cards, especially correspondents for papers hostile to our movement. My headquarters would be at the Central Post Office, where I was to have a whole suite of rooms on the fourth floor. Here news would be censored before it was sent abroad. With the aid of a sub-director from the Ministry of the Interior, known to be sympathetic to Kondylis, I would control the dispatches sent out to Stefani, Havas and DNB. I was provisionally promoted to the rank of second lieutenant in the reserves with "special censorial powers"—and they were, indeed, very special.



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*CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX*

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FIGHTING BEGAN before we had expected. Newsboys with hair flying were distributing their batches of papers. Little groups before the cafés swelled rapidly in numbers. Soon a mob was surging up and down the Rue du Stade. Police were brushed aside. There were bloody street fights, demonstrations and a confusion of orders and counter-orders. Artillery detachments rumbled. Outmoded tanks plunged round street corners. There was shooting everywhere. Houses were barricaded. A few fanatical Cretans in their local costume were firing rifles in the middle of Omonia Square. A dead man lay on the pavement.

The night of March 2nd-3rd, revolt exploded everywhere, at Drama, Chania, in Servia, at Volos and Patras. Venizelos decreed mobilization in Crete; Kondylis, in Attica; General Kamenos in Macedonia. The Ministry of War was lighted all night.

I had immediately joined Kondylis' crack regiment, the First Infantry, as an officer ready for orders. In Ambelokipos we anxiously awaited the news.

It was not too encouraging. The fleet and the Fourth Army Corps seemed to be drifting into the Venizelos camp.

At two-thirty in the morning, a General Headquarters car stopped in front of the barracks. There were a dozen bullet holes in its roof. I saw Karavillis get out, his tunic in rags. The chauffeur leaned forward on the wheel, then collapsed to the seat.

"The entire Acropolis garrison and part of the Thirty-Fourth Regiment have revolted," said Karavillis, "and gone over to Venizelos. They are preparing to march in the morning. Only the Fourth and Fifth Companies are for us."

He was off before I could reply.

The next news at the First Regiment headquarters was that the Seventh Company was not certain. Karavillis reappeared, leading the Cretan sergeant major, Bojadjis, hands raised, face

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blackened and savage. I heard shots from the barracks of the Second Machine Gun Company.

At three in the morning the phone rang.

"The General's personal staff speaking. At four o'clock your detachment will move to occupy the Central Post Office. The Second Machine Gun Company under Lieutenant Kostas has been ordered to support you in case of resistance. You will proceed by the following streets . . ."

Another phone call brought news that the Evilpedes Military College and three companies of the Evzones Presidential Guard had deserted the Tsaldaris government and gone over to Venizelos.

With Karavillis I set out for the barracks of the Thirty-Fourth. We were marching under cover of night with loaded Hotchkiss machine guns. The outlines of the Thirty-Fourth Infantry barracks emerged through the blackness. We mounted the steps. A short, ferocious hand-to-hand bayonet scuffle began. We did not use firearms for we did not wish to rouse the regiment; our object was to disarm sentries and secure the dissenting leaders. The sentries were quietly overpowered. Carrying a revolver in one hand and a grenade in the other, I followed Karavillis into the rectangular First Company barracks. It was a matter only of seconds before the barracks was surrounded; the officers surrendered without a blow.

Karavillis was to proceed thence with four companies to the Military College. The Evzones Presidential Guard saluted us as we approached the Royal Gardens; with the exception of three companies, they had rallied to the Athens government. In the first light of dawn these mountaineers in their picturesque costumes were gathered around little fires before the Zappeion. Machine guns had been mounted in front of the ministerial buildings on the Rue du Stade. Some ancient tanks were approaching along that wide avenue.

I went on with my detachment to the centre of the city. We occupied the Central Post Office, the *Eleftheros Typos*, *Eleftheron Vima* and *Makedonia* offices, and set up four machine guns at strategic positions.

I then had a chance to catch up with news and reports. At 4:30 A.M. word had come that the naval arsenal on the island of Salamis, with five destroyers and one cruiser, was in the hands of the Venizelists. At dawn, near the island of Hydra, government planes engaged the Venizelos fleet, damaging the cruiser *Averoff*. News came that, under orders from the pro-Venizelos Admiral Domestichas, the fleet had sailed from Crete



for Piraeus. Some hours later Domestichas and Venizelos broadcast appeals to the nation calling for armed revolt against the government.

The situation in Athens was critical. Fighting was continuing around the Acropolis and martial law was declared throughout Greece.

For about a week from the day that general mobilization was decreed and Kondylis, with an expeditionary force, went north to stifle the insurrection in Thrace and Macedonia, I was absolute master of press censorship. My appointment came directly from Kondylis, who thus passed over the heads of bureau chiefs, departmental secretaries and other career men whose rank and age might have given them preference. Later my responsibilities were taken over by the Ministry of the Interior.

In my office I was red-pencilling those parts of dispatches which should not be sent out of the country. Breathless people dashed in with wild gestures. Mr. Kudorfer came in and made an effort to be agreeable with as little success as may be imagined. He had a whole story prepared for the *Deutsches Nachrichten Buro*, which I banned in its entirety as a lying defamation of the government. The soldiers in the corridors yawned and sang songs. The incoming post was all brought to me. I indicated what newspapers might be distributed by the news distributing agencies. Hachette's representative came to reprimand me for having suppressed all editions of the *Journal* and *Canard Enchaîné* for running a caricature of Kondylis as a fire-eater.

The streets of Athens were now being patrolled and the government seemed to be consolidating its position; Athens was growing quiet. But Macedonia and Thrace were the real theatres of action. Kondylis was getting ready for a knockout blow against the General Plastiras clique.

Fresh from my revenge on Kudorfer, I could appreciate how prolonged acquaintanceship under variations of fortune had nourished personal hatreds among all the higher officers of the Greek army. Their animosities had been especially active since the successive Pangalos, Koundouriotis and Plastiras coups.

Meanwhile on the international scene the effects of the Greek revolution were already being felt. The moment General Kamenos had mobilized his forces in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Turkey massed troops on the Greco-Bulgarian border.



Bulgaria saw this as a Turkish threat to her own sovereignty, and complained about it to the League of Nations. Yugoslavia feared that Venizelos, disappointed in his former supporters and allies, planned to smash the French-inspired Balkan Pact—the mutual-assistance treaty between Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Rumania—and substitute for it an Italian-dominated arrangement between Albania, Bulgaria and Greece. About the first week of March, a few French, British and Italian warships sneaked into various Greek harbours.

On March 5th, I had a telephone call from Salonika. A courteous voice: "Major Anagnostopoulos speaking, the General's aide-de-camp. You're to come to general headquarters—the General's orders. The General wishes you to follow the campaign in Thrace in his suite."

I travelled in a train full of soldiers and some officers. Little was said. Towards morning we stopped at a dirty small station. A big American car was waiting for me, marked with a large Y.S. The uniformed driver was of an illustrious Athenian family, the Mavrocordatos. He was disgusted at having been drafted, and swore all the way, driving through rain, snow and sleet.

We set out through the mountains at a slow pace. Bivouac fires punctuated the darkness. An army of more than a hundred thousand men was assembled. We threaded a serpentine course that took more than an hour and at last entered the village that was serving as staff headquarters. It was typical of its kind; the houses were extremely clean and painted white and there was a tiny hotel, the only two-story building in the place.

A soldier led me into a dingy, low-ceiled room furnished with a table and field telephones. Some soldiers lined the wall and a woman, her face draped in a black veil, was making coffee for the General. Yawning sergeants were relaxing in battered chairs. All was quiet. It was 6 A.M. General Kondylis' adjutant received me, a seamed and tanned mountaineer, the type that rises from the ranks.

He threw open a door and I saw the general and Minister of War, in white stockinged feet and soft slippers, bending over a map. A half dozen of Kondylis' staff were following, over his shoulder, the movements of his thick thumb. The General wore a simple jacket with no gold ornaments. Other officers were studying maps in a corner of the room. Empty coffee cups on the tables pointed to a night of application.

I was asked to sit down at a table. The General stretched himself and came towards me. He stood with legs braced apart,



his eyelids reddened by his vigil and his tunic unbuttoned, displaying underwear of dubious freshness and a hairy chest.

"Well, how are things in Athens? All going well, eh?"

He was tired, but composed and smiling. He questioned me about the state of popular sentiment and the feeling in foreign circles. Though he spoke no foreign language correctly and had few relations with influential foreigners in Athens, he was ambitious of being talked about abroad as the reformer of Greece. He spoke deliberately, congratulating me on my exploits at the Thirty-Fourth Infantry barracks and my work at the Post Office.

Leading me to a map, he pointed out red spots indicating the positions of Kamenos' army corps. Its headquarters were at Kavalla; the Venizelists had no air force and no artillery to speak of. Kondylis thrust his blunt finger at the red spot; raising his voice, he spoke as though he were Achilles addressing Homer.

"Go back and tell Athens in a few days they shall hear I have squashed Kamenos—like an eggshell." He made the appropriate gesture and continued, "He's got his back to Bulgaria, and that's where he'll skip to." Finally, with a prophetic roar, "Kamenos, you Plastiras bastard, watch out!"

From our talk about general politics, I gathered the general was distrustful of Metaxas, the "Little Moltke of Greece". He said little of Panayotis (Tsaldaris). From time to time he complained of "garbled information".

"Abroad they seem to expect Venizelos to win. Not a chance! Here the history of Greece will be decided, in Macedonia on the River Struma.

"We begin the attack in forty-eight hours on the whole front."

I returned to Athens, to the very place where some years earlier I had been so ignominiously detained, the *Phrourarchion* or Commandery of Athens. From there I sent reports by direct wire to the general about reaction abroad and about instances I observed of what he called "garbled information".

One night I was lying on my couch at the *Phrourarchion* and trying to catch some sleep, though the telegraph operator beside me was reading dispatches aloud—a fresh list of persons to be arrested, mostly in the refugee quarters, which swarmed with Venizelos' sympathizers from Asia Minor. A non-commissioned officer set out with a patrol to make the arrests. About 3 A.M.,



a Lieutenant Petros N—— came in, a cavalry officer of about thirty. I had met him first in the company of Karavillis and Stamatiadis. He was somewhat volatile and excitable, but I thought it might be fun to talk with him, as he always had some story about the opening of a new brothel or an amorous intrigue. To-night, however, he had an air of mystery and importance as he seated himself on the edge of the couch.

"Secrecy is indispensable. There's a great deal at stake!" he whispered, laying his revolver on the table and easing his boots. "I'm here on instructions from headquarters." He leaned close to me. "I have in my pocket an order for the execution of certain persons who, it seems, have been *plotting* while the general is fighting in the north. . . ."

Running over the list, I saw, among other names, that of Metaxas. In amazement I asked if it meant the minister John Metaxas.

"Exactly. He's been getting up a conspiracy to grab everything—in other words, make himself absolute dictator. It's not Tsaldaris that will get in Georgios' way."

The lieutenant smelled of alcohol and I wondered if he were joking. There would have to be definite evidence to justify the assassination of a man as popular and prominent as Metaxas. Lieutenant N—— asked me to give him four reliable men and a sergeant immediately. His car was waiting outside. His orders were categorical and were to be executed between sunset and sunrise that night.

I recalled other men in the Kondylis clique who had expressed suspicions of Metaxas. Yet all this smelt to me like a scheme hatched up without the general's knowledge by hot-heads in his entourage. Lieutenant N—— was known as a crackpot to whom one political assassination more or less meant little; earlier he had been mixed up with the former Chief of Police Polychronopoulos in an attempt on Venizelos. Now he glared at me in a way that made me almost fancy my own life was in danger.

"So, then," he snarled, "you refuse obedience to a General Headquarters order? Stand up. Your revolver!"

There could be little question of my refusing. Already four men were buckling on belts and loading their Mannlichers. Yet I knew that not even simple arrests could be made in Athens without the countersignature of the Phrourarchos. Metaxas, that eloquent, febrile-minded little Royalist, had powerful connections abroad. It would damage the whole Kondylis movement if he was killed. I had to stop it! All the



victims on the lieutenant's list—Metaxas, Mylonas and General Papoulas—the last two Venizelists—lived at Kiphissia. I made rapid calculations. It would take him an hour to reach Metaxas' house.

I countersigned the order. As soon as the patrol left, I got on the phone. For some reason it was impossible to get a call through to Karavillis. I had no better success with the Director of the Secret Police at Athens. Finally I tried Stamatiadis.

"Jorgos?"

"Yes," a tired voice answered.

"Ah, good!" I explained the situation, stressing the need of prompt intervention.

N——'s army car was stopped by an Evzones Guard patrol on the road to Kiphissia. A certain Captain Palamas took the matter in hand for maturer consideration. The list with Metaxas' name disappeared and the whole thing was hushed up. Stamatiadis pressed my hand. Metaxas continued his senatorial eloquence and Mylonas and Papoulas, the two Venizelists, fled to Crete. General Kondylis' bravos hinted that silence would be best.

I was silent for years.

Three times, at General Kondylis' insistence, I travelled into the Seres-Drama region in Thrace. He should not have insisted, for what I saw there shook to the foundations my faith in the honesty of his movement.

Thrace is a tobacco-planting region. The peaceable peasant villagers there are superior to most, cleaner and more literate; they are intelligent-eyed, hospitable and courteous—a people that are part and parcel of their mountains, valleys, streams and rocks. Although remote from civilization, they can be considered the best element in contemporary Greece. Kurt Werner had always spoken of this region as strongly radical, perhaps because of its nearness to Bulgaria and its Slavic sympathies.

The villages of Thrace were bloodstained. An unpublicized river of blood had coursed through their streets. Not the blood of soldiers. No, the blood of simple citizens—farmers, workers, fisher folk, who had refused to serve in any army, convinced that neither Kondylis nor Venizelos had the interests of the Greek people at heart. These citizens were treated as Communists and shot. In one village market-place, Kondylists and Venizelists, in futile mobilization attempts, had disposed of dozens of peasants and labourers between them. The press was



silent about these butcheries; but persons living near Drama, Kavalla and Seres will not soon forget them.

Somehow this story had to be told. After demobilization I sent to several liberal and Leftist papers dispatches about these bloodstained villages. The result of sending such articles abroad, of course, was that I lost many of the influential friends I had been acquiring in parliamentary circles. *Populaire* and *l'Humanité* were among the few papers that printed the story of the Thracian "workers' uprising".

I had been drawn into a mere feud between generals. I came out with a livelier hatred than before of a base and corrupt political tradition. The Greek generals who sought power as individuals, promising social benefits and failing to effectuate them, had no programme but to proclaim martial law and assassinate their opponents. Since they represented no democratic social forces, but were driven only by their personal ambition, they were incapable of bringing genuine reform to Greece and could only perpetuate the ruthless class oppression which had made possible their rise to power.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

THE STRONG MAN of Greece, Georgios Kondylis, who by now had promoted himself to Field Marshal, was holding an Easter egg in his left hand, in his right a great hunk of mutton. The fat dripped from his upturned moustache. The man had a Gargantuan appetite and, in his whole person, resembled a figure from Rabelais. He was now absolute master of Hellas and was at this moment giving interviews to representatives of the foreign press, who surrounded him with pencils upraised. It was not without political significance that the correspondent of the *Milan Corriere della Sera* sat at his right, smiling each time the general seized a hunk of meat in his thick, hairy fingers. An enormous platter full of bones built up in a tall pyramid had accumulated in front of the Marshal. As he answered



questions, he gnawed and smacked his lips and wiped his mouth with the palm of his hand. The idol of the army cared not a jot for the murmurs of criticism running round the room. Elegant officers in *grand gala* with blue and white ribbons and gold epaulettes, adjutants in gold shoulder knots, naval officers in spotless white uniforms, representatives of embassies, some priests and the Metropolitan of Athens hung on the great man's every gesture. Crowds outside shouted, "*Zito, Jorgo! Zito, Kondylis!*" They were carrying effigies of Venizelos with his goatee, skullcap and eyeglasses, and placards ridiculing General Plastiras.

"*Zito, Panayotis Tsaldaris! Zito, Kosta Kotzias! Zito, Zaimis!*"

The Evzones Guards in striking white-skirted costumes presented arms when Tsaldaris and the cabinet arrived in the court of the barracks. I recognized Stamatiadis in formal black. Karavillis, in his new major's uniform, accompanied the ministers to the table loaded with food. Whole lambs were turned slowly on spits. The Evzones got the viscera. There was *arni klephtikon*, or "thieves' mutton", a speciality of the mountaineers; a sheep, buried three days in its skin, was roasted with much seasoning.

I distinguished General Papagos' sharp profile at the farther end of the board. General Salistras was inclining his stiff trunk to catch some remark from a man in mufti. That was the Monarchist contingent. Correspondents observed with interest that, rather than appear in person, Metaxas had delegated a group of officers to represent him. Dr. Kovacs of the Budapest *Pesti-Naplo* was questioning me. Representatives of the *Kumhüriet*, the *Curentul*, the *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, and the *Popolo d'Italia* were all agog for a statement bearing on foreign policy. The general spat and cracked Easter eggs. He called me to interpret while he explained to the German Ambassador the origin of "thieves' mutton". By afternoon he had already drunk a good deal of retsina. A simple man, the idol of the folk of Trikkala and Prevesa, the "Thunderbolt" had no taste for the French wines and liqueurs.

Stamatiadis whispered in my ear that later Kondylis' intimate circle, Karavillis and some old army pals of his, would go to wind up the evening at the Glyfada seaside villa. No press correspondents, no cabinet ministers. We would eat and drink, listen to guitars and old ballads and songs of the villages of Attica.

Kondylis kept tapping my shoulder and getting me to in-



interpret in French, English and German. As I rendered each reply, he exclaimed, "Bravo! That is good". From time to time he would strike the table with clenched fist and say, "A new Greece, internally stronger and more united, will not change radically its aims and its destinies in foreign affairs!" Two big grease spots remained where he had grabbed me. Another favourite refrain of Kondylis' was, "To be worthy of the ancients, that's the thing!"

Between two toasts in honour of Tsaldaris and the general, the band played the national air. Karavillis came and pressed my hand silently. His eyes shone. He was happy. His wife was there in pink and white, talking with someone from the French legation. I understood everything in Karavillis' look; after years of despair passed at the frontier of Macedonia, he had achieved his purpose in life, the satisfaction of all his desires. I rejoiced at his happiness, remembering how kindly he had once spoken to me of "courage" and a "brilliant future".

Life resumed its course as though there had been no "revolution". The Karagiosi\* reopened, girls and children were still employed at the cigarette factories for fifteen to twenty drachmas a day. As usual, the food was bad and meagre on the freighters of the Athens shipping magnates; the peasants still struggled to wrest a living from the refractory soil.

Especially disconcerting to me was the closer knitting up of commercial relations with the Third Reich and Italy, and the continued infiltration—or, rather, multitudinous and arrogant migration—into Greece of the Reich's "new" men. More and more German merchandise poured in, and German firms were uniformly coming to be represented by standard-gauge Nazis, so that the Rue du Stade was overrun with fanatics gesticulating and heiling Hitler.

The local N.S.D.A.P. and the Berlin Gestapo had between them developed a system of threats and denunciations that worked like clockwork.

The dregs of Hitler's movement poured in daily from the north. Germans living in the Ionian Islands and in the Aegean were investigated with special rigour. The consuls were changed; every German in Greece was forced to subscribe to the *Völkischer Beobachter* and pay a year in advance all assessments and subscriptions. Thus they became good Germans. By the second year of the Nazi regime, meetings of the

\* Shadow theatre.



Philadelphia Club had turned into orgies of the New German Brownshirt Youth, who dispersed thence to the cabarets, insulting Greek citizens.

Every one of the three thousand Aryan Germans living in Greece was required to join the N.S.D.A.P. or the *Arbeitsfront*. The native sympathizers of the N.S.D.A.P. included the basest Greek types, such as the Kukuzides brothers, news printers. They spoke fairly good German and, after launching an anti-Semitic publication which was little read, they founded with Nazi money—the subsidy I had refused for my paper—the *Athener Zeitung*, a Party paper aiming to consolidate the pro-Nazi Greek element.

I had several times refused to turn over to the Party the lists of former subscribers to the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*. One morning, arriving at the office, I discovered tables and chairs overturned and papers strewn everywhere. I recognized the hand of Kudorfer's SS. They had stolen my old subscription lists, including the lists of new subscribers to Otto Strasser's *Schwarze Front*, published in Prague, and to German papers published in Paris, such as the *Pariser Tageblatt*.

Some days later a terror began in the German colony. Many were summoned to Berlin and others had to undergo investigation at the German Embassy.

New benefits had failed to accrue on the overthrow of Venizelos; old evils, far from being checked, were flourishing afresh. I remember, with special irony, a personal interview that afforded me matter for reflection, beyond what could be put in an article for the press.

Metaxas came towards me extending both hands cordially. He was fiftyish, smallish and short-necked, with a typical Greek face, dull brown with a moustache. Mobile and piercing eyes showed through his shell spectacles and he spoke with practised energy and precision. The Greek pupil of the Prussian Kriegs-Akademie was talking to me.

"I've read your articles," he said in perfect German. "Please sit down. Mr. Stamatiadis spoke to me of you. I know of your work and the admirable contribution you made during our great national revolution, your supervision of dispatches to the foreign press, and how you helped to make manifest abroad the justice of our cause."

He was whipping a dead horse in talking to me now of the "justice of our cause". But I had private reasons for being



interested in him. After all, I had saved this Monarchist leader from assassination at the hands of overzealous Kondylists—a fact of which he was doubtless quite unsuspecting.

Having saved him, I was bound now to consider whether it had been worth the trouble, all the more since I was by now completely disillusioned with regard to the major figures in the anti-Venizelist group.

I accordingly listened to his expressions of opinion with particular attention. He spoke of Greece's international relations. He seemed desirous of working out some plan of regular government censorship of news reports sent from Greece to foreign news bureaus. And he mentioned with some complacency the close ties linking Greece with the Third Reich. When he came to power some time later, his Fascist orientation was made clear in his creation of what he called "a Third Hellenic Civilization—along Spartan lines".

Metaxas' assassination would have been a grave tactical error, but I could not see that the world stood to gain much by his survival.

Soon after, I began liquidating my holdings in the *Internationale Zeitungsagentur* and the *Deutsche Buchhandlung*. Competition from the subsidized *Athener Zeitung* transformed the *Griechische Post* into a losing proposition. I resigned the presidency of the Association of Greek Foreign Newspaper Distributors. Whatever remained of my interest in Czech, Austrian, Hungarian and Serbian publishing houses went to the Librairie Chimchi in Salonika. Herr Kudorfer had won. The battleground was his. His man for "Cultural Relations", Herr Pommerencke, organized a new "Buchhandlung". The Athens N.S.D.A.P. completed the *Gleichschaltung* process by taking over all the newspaper agencies that had formed the core of the *Internationale Zeitungsagentur*, and which I had collected laboriously one by one.

There was nothing for me to do but to leave Athens. With a heavy heart I bade good-bye to my *Stammtisch* at the Philadelphia Club, and entrained for Paris. Until things changed in Central Europe, I would send dispatches to the few Greek newspapers who were still sympathetic to the liberal point of view.







## PART EIGHT

# GROUNDWORK FOR MUNICH

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### CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

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NIETZSCHE MADE some cryptic remark about joy, either that we wish every joy were eternal, or that joy has some magic power of creating its own eternity. That was all rather complicated; but loitering on the nearly empty beach I recognized that such moments of tranquillity were rare and fleeting enough to be prized.

I was living in a small bungalow near the water at Benerville, resting from the fatigue of recent months. There was a little garden and a poultry house behind it and beyond, some yellowing foliage and fields and pastures—in short, beautiful Normandy. Near by was an estate enclosed in sycamores, the house brightened with flower plots: it belonged to well-to-do Britishers, who were winding up the season. It was the first of September and the resort was rapidly emptying. Though it was autumn, I had lingered on, enjoying the soft air, the delicately diffused colours left by the slanting sun rays, the children busy with their sand castles and the older folk sunk in reflection.

It was not long ago that I had crossed the Pont de Kehl at Strasbourg, viewed the hamlets strung bead-like along the Maginot Line and observed the blue-uniformed sentries guarding the Rhine. It was good to know that some barrier existed to shelter this rural seaside peace and the bonhomie of the evenings I spent at the Café aux Jockeys where farmers, artisans, tradesmen, and sojourners like myself gathered for *apéritifs*, Norman cider and a game of *belotte*.\*

In such places one could learn the truth about the *Front Populaire*, France's recently created bulwark against Fascism.

\* Card game.



It was by spending my time at a café on a Calvados highway, a *bistro* at Aubervilliers, a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens, a *bureau de tabac* at the Porte d'Italie, in Rouen, Lille, Nantes, at the Michelin and Ferodo factories or the Chantiers du Nord-Ouest, that I came to know the plain people of France. And from the park benches, the *bals musettes*, the construction works, the roadside cafés and assembly lines—from all these places came the voice of the Third Republic. This was the France of the common man, the France of Blum and Jouhaux, of Péri, Gitton and Clamamus. The France of Jean, Pierre and Paul, of the *Quatorze Juillet* and the Bastille, the *sans-culottes* and the Grande Armée, of Pasteur and Descartes, Hugo and Barbusse. This was the republic I learned to love and cherish. Between this world at the Café aux Jockeys and the Quai d'Orsay was a divide—an abyss which the Front Populaire strove vainly to bridge.

I would sit *aux Jockeys*, playing *belotte* and drinking *pinard* with Léon Jouhaux' and Marcel Cachin's men, and listen to them talking familiarly about "Léon" and "Marcel".

"*Non, monsieur!* There will be no defeatism in our ranks as long as the CGTU\* exists. Don't forget that Léon can call a general strike any time there's real danger. One word, and millions of us would stop work to-morrow!"

The speaker was a heavy-set man with a frank, honest face and the large chubby hands of a working man. They called him Monsieur Jean. Turning to me, he continued, "Well, that's our weapon over the big boys. And none of that Boche stuff for us! He may never use it, Léon, but he's got the power, and Marcel is plenty tough, he won't lag behind".

All the players acquiesced, reassured for the moment by the thought of working-class strength in France. The *belotte* party continued.

The owner of the café, a wounded war veteran, plied between the bar and the card players, interjecting professional remarks. Now he stood, cheeks flushed and eyes bright, drinking in his shirt sleeves with a travelling salesman from the Auvergne while the latter's little frog-coloured Citroen, left with the motor running, fouled the air outside. "Here I am, for four years I defended France's soil inch by inch, and for what? To witness colonial swindles and failures in our foreign policy, and such by-products of rotten government as Stavisky—"

"*Ah, le bel Alexandre!*" laughed the salesman. "Smart man!"

\* Leftist Trade Union Bloc.



And Madame Hanau and her *Gazette du Franc* scandal. Smart woman!"

"Ministerial scandals! Corrupt politicians! That's all you hear," the café owner grumbled, pouring himself and his customer a stiff drink.

"And who owns all the brothels in Paris, if not parliamentarians?" asked the salesman, who by now had reached his fourth *cassis*. "The only question, as the students at the Café du Dôme put it, is whether Chautemps or Sarraut owns the 'Sphinx'. Me, I think it's Sarraut. I ought to know my countrymen."

Leaving my belotte partners, I joined the two. The salesman went on hurling accusations at the Paris government in the best Auvergnat—a dialect which proved to be strong in French politics.

"Monsieur Jean is right," declared the proprietor. "All that can save France is the Front Populaire."

So even here, at idyllic Benerville, Nietzsche's remark about joy being self-perpetuating seemed doubtful. The pleasures of the moment were marred by grave foreboding. France was going through a crisis and everyone talked politics. People remembered too well the events of February 6, 1934. The bloodshed in the Place de la Concorde had not been forgotten; it evoked spontaneous outbursts of indignation in the remotest hamlets. Since then Doumergue had superseded Daladier, Flandin replaced Doumergue, and Bouisson, Flandin. But the crisis went on. Laval, the man in the white tie, the cartels' man, came to power. Nearly two years had passed; the people *aux Jockeys* were still talking of the Stavisky scandal along with the new elections and the uncertainty of the whole future.

But the Leftist parties were gaining. They were the implacable enemies of corrupt politics. France's workers and peasants, the instigators and preservers of the Third Republic, were turning whole-heartedly to the Popular Front.

It was not so with many of my colleagues, who gathered their information in the fashionable Quartier du Bois or the newspaper offices on the Champs Elysées. There they heard only that the Popular Front was France's ruin. To know Marianne they should have played belotte in Clichy or Vanves, and drunk their *pinard* in a Calvados *bistro*. There you heard praise of united action against fascism, of the alliance with the USSR and Czechoslovakia.

But the voice of democratic France did not reach the correspondents—or the Quai d'Orsay.



Back in Paris, I devoured newspapers over my coffee. They recommended calmness in view of the "frank discussions" progressing between France and Germany.

Perhaps some people could be calm in Paris. I could not. I remembered too well the events of the spring of 1936, when I had been in Alsace-Lorraine, the eyes of young Alsatians striving to penetrate the thickening fog across the Rhine. I thought of the homely amenities of their little towns and cities, the good people opening their windows towards evening, the young girls walking out for a breath of cooler air, a passing *poilu* fixing them with a glowing, desirous eye, a farmer strolling, pipe in hand, between the low, whitewashed house fronts. His evening constitutional might well take him beyond a little wood which I often visited and there before him would be spread acres of crosses—the harvest of Verdun, Douaumont and Fort Vaux—with an occasional black-clad figure moving among the graves.

When I had last seen the region, an ink-blue, oppressive darkness had smothered the cemetery, imposing upon crosses and barbed-wire fortifications alike a silence broken only by the creak of a cartwheel. I had pressed my foot on the accelerator, eager to escape from a region alive with the murmur of too prophetic voices. The war-nightmare, still too fresh in human recollection, was looming ever nearer and larger. My car flashed along the tree-bordered highway, past a few tardy *poilus* returning to their cantonments. Then the blackness swallowed up all outlines and I was alone with an after-image of idyllic Alsace: crosses mounting guard over the carrion and dust that once opposed the invaders, and along a wide strip behind the remaining leafage, casemates with their living soldiers and giant guns.

I had seen the Rhine often enough in the course of student excursions; I was no longer an adolescent chanting snatches of Heine and Lamartine. I was a press correspondent serving a few Balkan papers of moderate circulation, but independent of the steel trusts and oil interests; papers read in humble Croatian homes, by Dalmatian fishermen, by peaceful Salonikan tradespeople, and in the slums of Piraeus. The Balkans were feeling the approach of the cataclysm. Their precaution against the Third Reich was the Little Entente and their one reliance was the guarantees of Western European powers. But what hope could they place in France, now that the events of March, 1936, had made politics a bitter joke, and public men had succumbed to reckless cynicism?



I had been staying at a farm in Alsace during those stupefying March days. The Rhine flowed beneath my window. A few trees still overhung the river, soon to be cut away by army men for improved visibility. The existing visibility was enough for those who knew both banks of the river. My landlord was always bending to scan the further shore, and his little boy had caught the idea and kept his nose flattened against the window-pane.

March 6th dawned bright and clear. The air was good; the first breath of spring touched the hills. But the farmer and his son had grave expressions as the files in field grey appeared on the other bank. The boy raced to the river. My landlord, the farmer—a stocky fellow a little canted to one side from the injuries of 1915—asked a longer grace than usual at supper. He could make nothing of the excuses his government was offering for inaction.

“That’s it, the beginning, no mistake. That—what do you call him—that Hitler—*hm*. Ah, *celui-là, l’merdeux*, we’ve got to stop him, or—”

The river flowed on like a haunting thought, no waves, no ripples. I went to my room and closed my eyes, intent on listening. A rising murmur, a continuous growl and snarl made me dizzy—as though with the flow of the river were mingled the age-old clangour of conquest. Fireworks rose from the other shore; it must have been a torchlight parade, the Nazi celebration of the “liberation of the German Rhine”.

“Die Wacht am Rhein” re-established . . . It stirred my recollections of the Hitler Youth, their pale faces and fanatic expressions, girls in brown jackets offering flowers, helmeted motor-cyclists with tight-pressed lips, and the Reichswehr passing.

Time dragged. That evening I went down to the village for a drink with non-coms from the garrison. We all waited tensely for news. The morale of the army and citizens was high. Toasts were drunk to “general mobilization”, to “routing the Germans”, and to “seizing all strategic points as far as Cologne”. The *poilus* were flushed and excited. That day the army brothels had closed at seven. Accordion music had stopped at the café.

I decided to leave at once, send out my dispatches.

Drops of rain splashed in the little puddles in front of the café. I got my Renault into motion. Wet tree branches scraped the battered top.

Back at the farm, when I got my luggage, I found the



owner still thrusting his unshaven face over the window grille, peering grimly east, as though trying to pierce the river fog. All that could be seen was the glow of fires on the farther shore and the water diffusing the glare. But I could not stand there staring.

At Strasbourg I sent off my dispatches. I drove all night, for I had to be in Paris in the morning. The small hours were hard; my eyelids sagged. The national highway was empty, save for some army cars driven at top speed.

A March rain beat unremittingly on the pavements and the heavy clouds hung low as I drove up the Champs Elysées. It was March 7th. Frenchmen in all walks of life were looking to their Premier for action.

Like a bolt from the blue had come Germany's repudiation of the Treaty of Locarno, followed by the thundergrowl of Reichswehr boots and wheels advancing to the Rhine. The famous note of repudiation had been sent that same morning to the French, British, Belgian and Italian ambassadors.

Those obese, rheumatic and over-diplomatic diplomats hurried to Wilhelmstrasse so that Baron von Neurath might show them the document. Simultaneously he offered, in the name of his government, to enter into fresh negotiation with the Locarno signatories with a view to concluding fresh treaties. In the name of his Chancellor he even offered to return to the League of Nations, if certain guarantees were furnished. The ambassadors communicated with their governments, for whom the occupation of the Rhineland was no news. They had known about it in advance, Mr. Eric Phipps and his intimates—Lord Londonderry and the Tory Ribbentrop-Astor clique. The British press had for months been declaring that the demilitarized zone was an anachronism; some papers had seriously advocated closer ties between England and Germany. It remained only to present the *fait accompli* in a happy, light to the French public.

But while correspondents of many nations were reaping their literary harvests, and politicians were launching into diatribes amid a thousand technicalities, anxious faces could be seen among Frenchmen, especially war veterans. A current of excitement traversed the underground network of the Maginot Line. The soldiers expected mobilization orders. They were the first to understand that the time had come to stop the tragedy in its first act. Voices from Verdun and Vaux whispered, "*Il faut en finir*". They were joined by other voices



from French farms and factories. For the first time in many years all the factions of the Republic seemed to be united. "*Il faut en finir*, we must stop the Boche . . . !" But the voices of France's men and women died in the mighty gale from across the Channel, that shouted: The Reich must have the Rhineland as a preliminary to an attack on the USSR. . . .

And from the large estates and chateaux of France other voices joined in that chorus. France was turning too radical. . . . One never knew what to expect next from a government that had introduced the forty-hour week, holidays with pay, increased capital levies, nationalization of war industries, and a military pact with the Soviets—the hated Front Populaire. . . .

A deadly gale blew from the chateaux and across the Channel in that March of 1936—a gale that proved mortal to Marianne.

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## CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

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THE PRIME MINISTER OF FRANCE at this time was Albert Sarraut, a weary and debilitated man, the rumoured proprietor of the "Sphinx". Always, everywhere, and at every crisis, the same wheelhorses were trotted out in France. It was a national malady. They all wore the Légion d'Honneur in their black coat lapels. They were "*braves hommes*", solid citizens, "men of the people", these good Republicans with honest French faces, who revelled in good food and picked their mistresses from that tragi-comic decadent arcanum of chic and culture, the *ancienne noblesse*. For in the interval between wining and dining, these worthies of the Third Republic derived exquisite titillation from contemplating the Bourbon lilies. At their luncheons they consumed the rarest vintages in the honour of any third-rate ambassador or politician. And many of them, like so many in England, put their faith in the happy illusion that the Third Reich had taken over police duty against the Red menace and would henceforth relieve them of the necessity for their own *Cordon Sanitaire*.



France woke on March 7th to discover that her Chamber of Deputies was a muted orchestra. Or, rather, that it could render only a cacophany of partisan dissonances while the heavy industrial cartels beat time. In a tired voice M. Sarraut invoked the Locarno Treaty. Strong expressions, like "immediate action", "mustering troops", and "the defence of our beloved nation" fell inert from his lips. They were only words—a public mockery and an occasion for private mirth among ministers and sub-secretaries. As the German Embassy took note of French apathy, and sent reassurances to the Wilhelmstrasse, the strained faces of the German General Staff became hourly more relaxed.

It was a cold Saturday morning. An anxious throng in the boulevard crowded round the morning bulletins, clamouring for mobilization, exchanging questioning looks. A worker in loose black trousers, his coat collar turned up and his cap at a jaunty angle, was cursing the Cabinet.

"*Alors quoi*, is France asleep? What are they waiting for, Hitler to complete his rearmament?"

A beggar beat stiff hands on his thighs. "*Avec ces salauds dans le gouvernement*, what do you expect?"

A little old fellow in a black hat shook his head. "*Merde, alors*—if we don't stop the Boches now, we'll never do it. And this is only a dress rehearsal—wait for the *grande première*. *Qu'est-ce qu'on va prendre . . . mon cochon . . .*"

I sent my dispatches to Athens and Belgrade.

Angry, cross and threatened with a cold, I taxied to Montparnasse. There some friends were arguing, while having a late supper at the "Rotonde". The carnival would reopen to-morrow; there would be a full cabinet meeting, a "decisive" meeting.

I gulped several vodkas and wrote a long report to the *Vreme* in Belgrade and the *Estia* in Athens. It was clear that beyond the Rhine the Nazi clique had won a first-rate diplomatic victory. European governments would turn toward the Wilhelmstrasse with rising respect. With the watch on the Rhine re-established, Germany could proceed to rearm, pursue her economic subjugation of South-east Europe, and prosecute her policy of winning sympathy in England as a potential bulwark against Bolshevism. The setback to France was terrific.

I came home late that night. The concierge could hardly contain himself as he passed me my key. "That bastard Sarraut! They pulled his claws, *le cul!* Boot-licker! And the nation sinking in the mire! Hitler on the Rhine . . . Mussolini



in the Alps . . . Just wait, you'll see what we have to take! Oh, là, là! *Non, mais sérieusement*, these specialists in new régimes—*ils nous auront!*”

I could not help but agree with him. That night brought me no sleep. I was haunted and exasperated by remembering Kudorfer's boasting. I still knew his was the wrong horse, but it began to look as if the wrong horse might win—and be a worse horse for all that.

## CHAPTER SIXTY

I CROSSED THE CHANNEL to England late that same March. Seven years had passed since I had been at Cardiff with the crew of the *Agios Gerasimos*. It had taken me more than a week to obtain the visa for a fortnight's stay in the land of ivied walls, rheumatism, and theories of the perfect crime—the land of roast beef and soapy vegetables. To such luxuries the Russian-born were admitted only with caution. The inspector at Dover studied my papers with particular care. He had an air of impersonal rigour very different from the Machiavellian slyness of border authorities elsewhere. His blue eyes seemed to be looking through one to far horizons.

I was to find that this prepossession with distance and empire was almost universal in England. From the cheery old men, who sat in parks with their feet wrapped in newspapers, waiting for a bit of spring to warm their unemployed limbs, to the grey-haired ladies in chauffeur-driven limousines—all were pleasantly conscious of pulling an oar in that vast enterprise, the Empire, which had flourished so long and on so big a scale that mere association with it created confidence and complacency. Then there were the girls and young women with forget-me-not eyes who set out to visit their sweethearts early Sunday morning, instead of passing Saturday night with them—all those women carrying bags that one saw in the earliest dawn, doubtless feeling that their abstention was a help in keeping Old England up to the mark—an illusion that was



shared by the freckle-faced girls who remained perpetually submerged in cheap novels or fancy work.

I had come to England with a purpose no more nefarious than to study public opinion in a nation whose attitude was decisive in Continental crises. But there was little to be learned that I might not have picked up in Paris by reading the English papers. Except, of course, that the bland unconcern of Englishmen at this time would have been incredible if I had not witnessed it.

In the streets, in the clubs, in the restaurants, the talk ran on the weather, the fog, business, and sport. Unheard were the groans from concentration camps, and no British dreams were disturbed by the frightened faces on the Continent. The world situation and Hitler's last diatribes had no place in English life. I tried to talk politics with the butcher, the waiter, the barber and the news vendor. Always with the same result. Politics were a bloody bore. Even political and news broadcasts appeared to be dull, for the dial was always turned to another station announcing a football match. To obtain any facts for my papers about British opinion, I had to forsake my usual technique of conversing with ordinary people and was compelled to apply myself to English papers and the statements of cabinet ministers and parliamentarians.

I had earlier met some of the more interesting dominion or colonial Britishers. They cropped up everywhere, in the Mediterranean, in Africa and in the Balkans. I recalled a retired officer of the India service with the characteristic bronzed face and small white moustache. He had talked to me as he gulped endless whiskies on the terrace of the Trocadero, a smart restaurant at the Phaleron. After I listened politely to a few colourless anecdotes he seemed to take a fancy to me and called me his friend.

"We English," he blurted out presently, with a touch of humour and of pride, "we aren't intelligent in the Continental sense. The Briton is, above all, an insular individualist. We prefer to withdraw our minds from intrusive inspection and to hide, rather than exhibit, our thoughts. Some of our best men have brains of extraordinary scope and power. We are not in the least concerned about proving anything to the world. We merely show the world a certain quality—the quality we have developed in China, the Near East, India, and Latin America: British doggedness. Where we have once gone, we stay. And it isn't only on this or that continent, as this very sea you look out on bears witness.



"On the other hand, look at Germany, a nation I admire for her many good qualities: for her sense of the orderly, for her literature, her science and sportsmanship, the way, for example, this Teuton civilization is taking hold of the masses of South-eastern Europe. It advances by leaps and bounds. German ideas, newspapers, parties, clubs, and organizations multiply as they spread their net of propaganda. And where is it all getting them?" He paused a while. "Nowhere, sir! All their efforts lead only to more effort. . . . Poor colonizers. They hurry—they progress too fast to the shore of the sea—and there, well, there they discover they can go no further. The ocean is English. Yes, my dear sir, English to the core."

"So you've colonized that too?"

"Yes, and the democratic world can thank us for it. Hm, I know your objections. We're slow, conservative, and our present policy in the Balkans is ineffective. Yes, we may lose a battle here and there; but along with all our blunders—"

"I beg your pardon—defects."

"Let's not be technical. Let's call it blunders and defects. But you must admit we have a certain small quality, or, if you prefer, a habit: we never lose. And that goes for the sea as well as the continents. Even continents that have rebelled against our policies. Consider the United States. They will follow us everywhere in our wars and in our reverses. Our history is full of such examples."

We continued talking and drinking. I had rarely seen an old Indian official so loquacious.

His words came back to me as I sat in a Lyons Corner House before a plate of bacon and eggs, reading articles on the debates in the French Chamber of Deputies and on the arrival of Herr Ribbentrop in London. I had heard all my life of the famous British bulldog tenacity. But even the practice of tenacity involves some thought of ways and means. English "muddle-headedness" in the past had often proved to be only a disarming front behind which operated keen wits and resourceful cleverness. Would it prove so now?

Since 1932 it had been apparent that the nations sitting around the green table were bandying words and documents and accomplishing nothing, much less honouring promises made to millions of war veterans that the World War was to be the "last". The excuse for each failure had been that "public opinion lagged". No public opinion was regarded with more reverence than the British. English newspapers were crammed with respectful allusions to it. And yet, palpably, public opinion



had ceased to exist except as it was kept alive by those very newspapers. It could "lag" or push ahead, just as the editor's and his owner's fancy directed.

In the dictator countries public opinion was forged exclusively by the fascist leaders. German journalists were officials, with their status, hours of work, duties and privileges all defined. Every morning they got from Dr. Goebbels their orders, which were to direct public opinion in certain channels.

In democratic England, public opinion was wonderfully played upon, and made a perfect instrument of one class—the Tories. It had been, so to speak, transformed into a volatile gas, which was then stored in tanks and could be turned on and off at the Cliveden clique's convenience. Of course, in the process, it ceased to be "public", though it went on being called so. The British people had given it away or permitted it to be taken away, and it now concerned them no more than the stranded whales which in England are a royal monopoly.

In a general way this evolution was traceable to the fact that the ownership of the most important papers had passed into the hands of a clique homogeneous in its viewpoint and identified with property interests and profit-making rather than with national or world problems. Surrounding this group, acting on it and being acted upon in turn, were the big advertisers, whose patronage, in both senses, kept newspapers out of the "red". While in any other way their ideas and opinions were democratically flexible, their hostility to Russia and the "Front Populaire" was a constant obsession.

The press became the exponent of a theory that Germany's aggressive spirit had been redirected against the East—that is, Russia. Englishmen were encouraged by the press to cultivate their virtue of insularity. There were minor distinctions, such as that between a Loyalist and a Franquist, that an average Englishman did not care to bother about. Spain counted only in so far as British investments were affected. Recently, the papers had been slipping before their readers friendly interpretations of Goering's four-year plan for German production of steel and aluminium, and favourable comments on Germany's airplane factories and expanding plants for turning out machinery. They had even found excuses for German propaganda directed against whatever was not German or German-dominated.

When this proved not quite enough to allay suspicion in England, Goering, who needed British resources to carry out his schemes, made England a gift of the ingratiating Herr von



Ribbentrop, a man well connected with the world of finance, and on the best of terms with leading English conservatives.

Herr von Ribbentrop had for years been making an excellent impression among ruling-class people in England. As an agent of the great Junker-controlled industries and of German finance capital, he had managed to influence opinion through a chain of newspapers that were sympathetic to developments in Germany. He was handsome, well-dressed, magnetic, and a "nice fellow". He had about him nothing of the Prussian, an unwelcome type in fashionable London circles. He did not click his heels and had left his monocle at the Berlin Herrenklub. His manners were pleasing, his conversation sprightly. He was subtle. Travelling as a champagne salesman in Germany and France, he had learned to evince cordiality to the stupidest patrons.

He was received in the best houses of feudal England, subscribed to formalism and tradition and readily accommodated himself to periwigs. In the spring, by the leafy sedge, he assiduously cheered on the Oxford and Cambridge oarsmen. He charmed the élite and was able to keep up with them, having married the daughter of a wealthy dealer in German sparkling wines.

In London, the junior partner of Henckel's Champagne deplored the excesses of certain Nazi leaders, but declared that they had no influence on the Wilhelmstrasse. The British aristocracy readily excused crimes committed by the N.S.D.A.P., inasmuch as the heads that rolled were those of the class enemy. Personal charm and the inexhaustible smile of the well-equipped salesman were Ribbentrop's recipe for winning influential hearts and moulding opinion. And while he was turning English sympathy towards Nazi Germany, he did not neglect the network of spies and informers by which he was kept posted on English sentiment and industrial development.

British imbecility appeared infinite. In German politics it was without precedent; an ex-champagne salesman was pacifying Downing Street and bulldozing Europe, without a drop of blood being shed. The German press had two foreign departments: that for home consumption, which spoke of German conquests to the West, to the East, and to the South, and that for consumption abroad, as for instance the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* and the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, whose tone was so moderate as to make Germany appear a nation quite eligible to do business with England. This deception, under cover of which Germany gained time to develop the greatest armament



programme the world had ever seen, could, however, be effective only with incurable optimists—or with statesmen who had class motives for joining in Hitler's game.

This was what I had come to England to discover. Would the British try to stop the Führer's triumphant aggression? I saw no sign that they would. Feeling less hopeful than ever before, I recrossed the Channel to France.

In the last days of February, during the political upheavals in Greece, details of a strange story had begun to leak out from Germany. Because of the Greek revolution and the temporary mobilization, I hadn't had much time to give it my attention. Baron Yurek Sosnowski, a handsome young Pole, and Baroness Benita von Berg, whose first husband had been Richard von Falkenhayn, son of the late General von Falkenhayn, had apparently taken over where Captain Amerzinski and the people I had known in Berlin in 1929 had left off. And the Nazis had uncovered the ring.

But the iron Nazi censorship had clamped down. The Sosnowski-von Berg case became a legend—until it reached a grim dénouement in the sombre halls of the Nazi People's Court. The Court sentenced Baroness von Berg and Frau von Natzmer, a Reichswehr Ministerium employee, to death, and Count Sosnowski to life imprisonment.

This entire affair worried me only from one point of view. Wanda—what had become of her? Rumours had spread that two unnamed female employees of the Defence Ministry and some women in the highest Berlin social circles, as well as two foreigners, one married to a German citizen and thus subject to Nazi law, had died by the axe at the Plötzensee Prison.

One of the women had been Polish before she married a Reichswehr officer. Could it be Wanda? This notion tormented me often.

Once I came across a news report of the beheading of Baroness von Berg and Frau von Natzmer—the newspapermen described in detail how the women had been led to the execution block in coarse prison garb, and how their heads had rolled off the blood-caked execution block into the sawdust of the Plötzensee courtyard. . . . Every time I tried to banish this fear, a picture of Wanda came back to me. Not the Wanda of Paris or Normandy, but as I had seen her in Berlin, in the wintry Tiergarten, extending me a cold hand. That had been the end.

At night I had dreams—visions of an incongruous execu-



tioner in a yellowish celluloid shirt-front, a silk hat and an old red-spotted tailcoat. The executioner's face changed; once he looked like Dr. Schäfer, then again like Oberlehrer Wassel or Behrisch. But always he impassively raised the gleaming axe which fell down to sever a neck—Wanda's. My extreme nervousness prevailed so long that I decided to see a nerve specialist. . . . And then came the solution, the answer.

It was a misty night and the streets were deserted, but the Boulevard des Italiens resembled an electric fairyland. The imposing Opéra was enlivened by artificial suns, whose intense rays approximated to a glaring day. Vast projectors raked the building. Blue lights clothed its walls in moonshine too intense to be real. Horns tooted along the pavements of the Place de l'Opéra, shrieking a protest at the traffic jam caused by people slowly alighting from black limousines and from red and yellow taxis. Then the exit from the theatre began. I crossed the street to the Café de la Paix. It was filled with an elegant crowd—elaborate coiffures, lacquered or draped with shimmering scarves. Suddenly I saw a familiar face at a table opposite. My eyes met the eyes of a woman who seemed herself to be seeking recognition. I tried to remember where I had seen her before. It was only after a moment or two of concentrated thinking that I could place this face. . . . It was Brigitta—Countess Brigitta Z——, from the old Victoria-Luisen-Platz crowd.

I made my way to her table.

It must have been very late. Sleepy waiters were cleaning up, the last guests were gone. Brigitta and I were still sitting at our corner table. Now I knew the silk hat and the tailcoat I had visioned were not the product of nervous hallucinations. It was all true. Wanda had married a young lieutenant from the Prussian nobility, and as a German subject, had been boheaded in Plötzensee—three months after the Baroness von Berg.

It was raining, but I hardly noticed the puddles between the flags or the water trickling over my shoes. My head ached fearfully, and I drifted aimlessly along the street. Over the Seine the dark sky was lit up occasionally. I was stunned. It seemed as though nothing existed.

Some lorries were rattling over the pavements, a few tardy prostitutes were making their rounds.

I walked all night and somehow arrived at the Seine embank-



ment. Here were the trees of the Place du Cloître Notre Dame, where I had spent my first evening with Wanda. The little square was unkempt; the dripping trees, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace, made a vault above the bench where I let myself fall. I looked around in the dimness, lighted by a lonely lamp-post. These were the same trees, the same bench; nothing had changed since, save for two of the elms, which had thrust tortured roots out of the quiet earth. Now they were black and ugly and the roots looked like moonlit claws. I sat there, my heart beating irregularly, the unaccustomed sensation of tears welling in my eyes.

About four o'clock it began to rain again. I entered a hotel. I needed a few hours' sleep. A woman gave me a key. A singular light shone between her reddened eyelids. If I was lonesome, she said, all I would have to do was to knock at the door to my left. . . . The girls were very nice . . . and clean.

I walked up to the room. Saltpetre encrusted the walls. Fungi were consuming the legs of a wretched table preserved from better days. Dampness everywhere. A towel was spread across the enamel basin—quite grey. Böcklin's lithograph—"Island of Death"—hung in a broken frame.

I let myself fall in a chair, wet through. My head was heavy. I sat for hours. The room was ice-cold.

Wanda . . . She was alone, alone that morning in the small hours before the execution. Maybe she was feverish, or semi-torpid or just somnolent and resigned in those hours preceding the last great sleep. And then her tense, stricken face, and the horrible shadows in the early mist. Like stagnant water it must have felt. She so fine, so elegant.

I couldn't stand the thought. Certain phrases, certain words she had said, bored into my head. It was an agony.

It must have been morning when I took off my coat and fell on the bed, dead tired, wet, utterly weak. It was late in the afternoon when I awoke to loud voices in the adjoining room, the banging of doors, the smell of burning coffee.

A correspondent of Balkan newspapers, paid in dinars, drachmas and levas, and concerned with setting forth the views of the Front Populaire, could have no office except the corner of a café table. I had mine in a small café on the Boulevards. As the days passed, I spent much time there, reading various papers, from *Izvestia* to the *Rigasche Rundschau*, from *Popolo d'Italia* to the *Petit Marseillais* and the *Berner Bund*. Occasionally



a friend would come to see me and we would play a game of chess. Then back to writing again.

The Paris winter season was in full swing. Men with top hats, canes and patent leather shoes were escorting fur-draped women in long gowns. A line had been formed to pass between the rows of onlookers at the entrance to the "*bal des petits lits blancs*". Super-Paris was there from the realms of finance, stage, screen and diplomacy—an artistic and fashionable general mobilization to delight the snobs of two continents.

Late editions of *Ce Soir* were featuring a socialist congress in Belgium and the most recent decrees of Herr Goering. The Havas agency announced the signing of the Anglo-Italian Mediterranean pact. The year 1937 had begun on the note of vertigo. The war in Spain was at its height. The Republican government had established itself in Valencia. Germany and Italy were waging open war on the Largo Caballero Ministry and Republican Spain. German and Italian troops figured jointly with Franco's Moors in the taking of Spanish towns. And while the Frente Popular fought desperately for existence, the radical socialist congress at Biarritz was debating matters of no importance, under the artillery fire of Franco's guns, echoing from San Sebastian. The Reich was signing the Germano-Japan pact. And while German Kondor legions dropped bombs on Spanish towns, Marshal Goering early in January set out for Rome for a conference with Mussolini to work out the details of their military collaboration.

Luxurious Champs Elysées hotels were packed with refugee Spanish nobility, lavish spenders and a gold mine for the bars and night clubs. In the same bars sales of munitions to Spain were negotiated between cocktails. Wealthy refugees from the Reich had opened import and export houses and were handling munitions. The sales were to the highest bidder and the terms were cash.

Severe press censorship under Metaxas at Athens and from similar forces in other Balkan capitals, combined with pressure from the increasingly influential German embassies, was preventing most of my articles from being printed. And even when a story was sold, the dinars, drachmas and levas often failed to arrive, through new totalitarian interdicts against the exportation of currency.

Thus in the midst of the political events of 1937, revealing the impotence of the democracies and the rising power of the Fascist nations, I found myself looking for a salaried job.



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*CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE*

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IT WAS ABOUT ten o'clock when I arrived at an elegant private mansion on the Avenue du Bois. On the first floor, behind a long table piled with books, magazines and papers, a handsomely dressed man was sitting in a big leather chair. Negligently he waved me to a seat. Though apparently weary and bored, his piercing eyes took in my every movement.

"You are a Russian with Greek citizenship, are you not?"

He questioned me smoothly, leaving hardly enough time for answers. In his speech was a variety of foreign accents jumbled together. A secretary brought in a bunch of papers, laid them before him and went out.

"Your passport is valid?" He began signing the papers casually. "You are free to travel, I mean?"

Nonchalantly he drew out a gold cigarette case with the initials *J* and *E* in rubies and diamonds; it was from Fabergé and of exquisite workmanship. I accepted a cigarette.

I was face to face with the president of a large export-import firm.

The man had made millions discounting Soviet notes. He put up "bancos" of 100,000 francs at the Deauville and Monte Carlo casinos. He was paying record prices for race horses. He controlled an insurance company and had a monopoly in the North African cork industry. He had invested imaginatively in land, buildings, construction, and in armament enterprises. He had the Légion d'Honneur, the red ribbon, a decoration for integrity and courage.

Since emerging from the ghetto at Bialystok, he had come a long way. He had long since forgotten his childhood, the *Heder*, the once-familiar faces. Stage and screen stars now competed for his passing fancy. The maître d'hôtel bent low and echoed in an Oxford accent his order for "Champagne Cordon Rouge". His Rolls-Royce landau with two chauffeurs waited at the kerb. From the ghetto at Bialystok to the Avenue du Bois, it had been a continuous success,



"You're a correspondent, aren't you, for Leftist papers? Familiar with Central Europe and its economy?"

"Yes."

"Married?"

"No."

"So much the better. You know Mr. Montasheff? He has told me of your family—your father—before the Revolution."

He tested me with a few words in correct German, then English and Italian.

"Four thousand francs for a start. Agreed?"

I left the room and was accompanied to the door by a lean man in livery. I had been engaged as a secretary, or something of the sort, at four thousand francs a month, work to start the next day. I needed the money, as cheques from publishers in Athens were becoming infrequent and living was dear. I walked down the Avenue du Bois, refreshed by the air. A fine rain moistened my face.

I paused, out of breath, at the *bureau de tabac* on the Avenue Wagram, swallowed two cognacs, then a third, much intrigued with the thought of the new profession I had automatically accepted. For the first time in my life I had bought a sweep-stake ticket.

The man behind the counter, with rolled-up shirtsleeves, went on dousing a rag in the boiling water.

My new employer was a strange fellow. I had heard quite a lot about his firm, but I did not know until I started to work that they were engaged in the munitions traffic, much less that they were involved in the struggle in Spain. What an odd fancy, to be working for "Exports-Imports"—and at the same time going on with reporting and with my intellectual life. For, in short, it was a merchant of cannon who had hired me. Oh, well—so long as he was selling to the right people, I'd play.

The Bourse. Basic commodities. Dancing figures. Bars. Splendid luncheons. A kaleidoscope of images since I joined the general staff of my new *patron*. Our work was pursued in smart bars and chic restaurants. In clipped phrases *le patron—the boss*—stated his terms: "Good! A hundred thousand francs. Fifteen per cent for you if the deal goes through". He was served by a throng of agents who dug up the persons needed and arranged the exquisite meals. At Korniloff's we lunched with Americans from Buffalo. At the Poisson d'Or



we dined with Spanish officials of the Loyalist purchasing commission.

We made "gifts" of thousands of francs to the wives of the employees of certain ministries, following the French custom of doing business through the fair sex. Whenever the *patron* needed to put over a big deal which required only the signature of some minor ministry functionary or employee, we gave presents to his wife or mistress. These gifts came directly or indirectly from the jewellers or the Rue de la Paix or the big dressmaking establishments of the Place Vendôme, depending on the importance of the signature.

A new Dutch—South-American combine was now being formed. The combine would contract for national public works; its stock was already on sale at the Bourse.

The *patron's* two other secretaries were impeccable. They did the figuring; I prepared statements to the press, for writing was not the boss's forte. Combines were. And figures. "Amazing head!" cried the bankers. Spreading their legs and brandishing their cigars as they sipped liqueurs, his associates talked of the international situation. They agreed perfectly. Not the Second or the Third International, but the Fifth—the Fifteenth—the bankers' international was assembled here. The wheels were well greased and it functioned admirably. My employer hovered on the verge of migration to the realm of high finance and heavy industry. His analysis of political events tallied with mine; we were rushing towards war. Hence, munitions—profits from hand grenades. But should the *patron* invest in war industries under a "radical" government, the Front Populaire? And with talk of Thorez and Péri in the cabinet! No, better stick to commission merchanting. Buy in Germany, sell in Spain; buy in Holland, sell in Mexico. It was safer. And then put the money in the banks of New York and Buenos Aires.

The boss walked the floor with his hands behind his back. Van Goghs and Renoirs mingled with Italian primitives in his luxurious offices, lending them the look of a bazaar. His Corot, however, was a forgery. He knew it and I knew it, but he didn't like the idea that I knew. It had cost him forty thousand francs. I smiled inwardly, recalling the little *atelier* facing Notre Dame where a Russian artist friend of mine, who was nearly always drunk, executed Corots at three hundred francs apiece for a certain gallery on the Faubourg St. Honoré. Poor Vutovich, he has since died of tuberculosis. What an artist for imitations,



even perfectly reproducing the signatures! His death robbed the B—— Art Gallery of an invaluable connection.

From the moment the boss found out that I knew about the forged Corot, he resented my knowledge, and our relationship was on the down grade. Nevertheless, he let me share in his troubles. On this particular day he was in a bad mood. Telegrams were strewn across his table: some difficulties had arisen in connection with his Dutch—South-American consortium.

Suddenly my eagle-beaked *patron* halted, as if remembering something that was a long time overdue. It was the cheque for the synagogue. He was a devout Israelite, supported the synagogue, and scattered some notes every week through the Rue des Rosiers. In fact, whenever he was politically or economically in a jam, he took out the cheque-book he kept in a particular drawer consecrated to the synagogue.

The Rolls-Royce had special and powerful headlights. My employer and I dashed through Belgian towns and cities without slowing down. It was raining and my employer, packed into one corner, thought the speed perhaps was excessive. The road might be slippery. He'd rather avoid any risk.

"At what time will you be in Amsterdam, Paul?"

Our chauffeur muttered something like, "Six-thirty or seven, if we push it."

"No, no. Don't take any chances. How often do I have to tell you—no risks?" he cautioned severely. "You are not a Cossack and this isn't the army of the Tsar!"

The *patron's* voice was rather strained whenever he had to check Paul. The latter, a former Guards officer, was an excellent driver, Russian, blond and blue-eyed, taller than average, and always scrupulously shaven except for his small, well-trimmed moustache. The chauffeur's uniform became him. He was about forty-five, sober and discreet, never betraying by the slightest frown what went on inside him when the *patron* started conversations that always wound up in the region of Bialystok, Pinsk, or Rovno.

In contrary moods, the *patron*, a "democrat", liked to reproach Paul, an ardent Monarchist, with all the errors Tsarist officials had once perpetrated in such towns. Paul would then become extremely reserved and try to change the subject.

"How long have you been a chauffeur, Paul?"

"Eleven years, sir."

The boss's inquisitiveness was sometimes infuriating. He



liked to practise his Russian, which he spoke execrably, mixing in Yiddish words, on Paul. After hours of insult and violence to all that Paul held sacred, the chauffeur was often handed a fifty- or hundred-franc note as a well-earned "*pourboire*".

A procession of noiseless wheels and bicycles—windmills, canals, box-like houses with square balconies—told us we were in Holland.

My employer's financial genius was building up his new Dutch—South-American export consortium of European heavy industries. Already his agents were at work at Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, preparing the ground, making the mouths of cabinet officers water in expectation of large profits. Dutch industrialists, their broad, stolid faces flushed with energy and health, were awaiting the *patron's* arrival. Days passed in negotiation; allotments of stock were exchanged. Then we would move on to Sweden, to the Bofors munitions plants, to Tammersfors, and Njörköppingen. Thence to Germany and Czechoslovakia. . . .

Reporters at the Amsterdam aerodrome. Had the consortium been founded? Names of the directors? What banks were underwriting the enterprise? I gave out the *patron's* guarded answers. Then we climbed into a black-winged Fokker and took off. The *patron* nervously smoked a cigar. He was not fond of aeroplanes. Invest in them? Sure. But not fly, except when he had to. Nor did he like travelling in Germany, even with a French passport and recommendations from the Quai d'Orsay! The way people looked at his nose made him feel awkward.

Far below the Fokker, the skyline was crystalline. There were quantities of islands—Seeland, Laaland, Fehmarn—irregular shreds of Danish soil. The plain of North Germany to the right, boldly slashed by the Kiel Canal. There were toy transatlantic liners in the Elbe—for me phantoms of a remote past—Hamburg. Ashen-hued but somewhat recovered from his nervousness, he was dictating a letter.

At Stockholm, the sumptuous Grand Hotel. I had stayed there with my parents seventeen years before, after leaving Finland. The *patron* was arranging for the shipment of fifty Bofors anti-aircraft guns, at four thousand pounds sterling apiece, to the Madrid government. The fifty anti-aircraft guns must have optical accessories. We must get them from Zeiss at Jena. German instruments on Swedish guns to protect Spanish Republican cities from the aeroplanes of the Italo-German squadrons. The Heinkels and Capronis also



were equipped with sighting and aiming devices from Zeiss. A curious war! But in 1937 Germany was the only nation that turned out military optical equipment in sufficient quantities for export.

There were constant phone calls to Paris. Senators must be bribed so that the guns could have transit across France over the Basque border, avoiding the obstruction of the non-intervention commission. Contact must be maintained with the Loyalist Purchasing Mission in Paris.

"Hello. Stockholm."

"Hello. Paris. The Spaniards need a hundred additional anti-aircraft guns. They are selling treasures of the Church, Murillos, Velasquez. Pay in gold."

The people of Spain were paying for their birthright in blood and sweat and gold. . . .

More telegrams from Mexico: "The twenty-nine bombing planes are crated and ready to be loaded on ships. The Mexican banks have the documents in hand."

Twenty-nine planes for Spain, with some forty spare motors and twenty per cent replacement parts. These aircraft, ordered a year before, were never to reach the Spanish front. Behind that was a whole intrigue. Purchased by the boss supposedly for "Air France", they never reached the frontier of Republican Spain! Juan March's men succeeded in diverting the shipment. The excuse later offered the government of Spain was that the trial flights had been unsuccessful and that important alterations must be made. It turned out that the vice-president of the Company had close ties with Rome. Every movement of the twenty-nine planes was under the control of sabotage agents, disguised as freight and insurance people. So with hundreds of items. A highly effective international conspiracy against the defenders of the Spanish Republic was producing colossal sabotage.

I attended my new employer from capital to capital, by train, by motor car, by air. I re-entered Germany under his protective wings, using a passport made out in my middle name, which was unknown to the German authorities. We stayed at the Adlon in Berlin, occupying a suite of rooms. It was an odd feeling to be in Germany unafraid, protected by a Jewish financier whose international interests put him beyond attack.

Down the avenue of the years there came to my mind another night like that. Music coming up from below. The pavements equally empty. Berlin was singularly quiet. The big



hotel had the same solemn dignity and a servant was whispering to me, "Your mother is celebrating her marriage." My view of the past excited indefinable emotions. . . .

I spent my days visiting factories and mercantile houses. Here the *patron's* imposing nose caused no comment. He was French and was a customer, a big customer recommended by large industry. France's ambassador in Berlin, M. François Poncet, himself a steel-cartel man, assured introductions to important personages of the steel works, of the Mannesmann Röhrengesellschaft, Büssing-N.A.G., Gothaer Waggonfabrik, of Siemens-Schuckert, of the IG Farbenindustrie, of Rheinmetall, of Julius Pintsch Co.

He was placing large contracts for Central and South America, freeing blockaded marks. Discussing Spain, he said, "Not a chance for the Loyalists." He said it drily and sharply, as though it were a banking transaction that he could control. I thought of his persecuted co-religionists, crowded in ghettos, and of pogroms against humbler folk, Jewish artisans of Alexanderplatz and Grenadierstrasse. They were still there. As for the rich, they had gone abroad and continued doing business through their Aryan employees. In a thousand ways they had extricated their money, their paintings, their jewels. I had been told how a paper manufacturer had sent twenty rolls of paper to England. The London customs official, on unwrapping the rolls, had discovered eight hundred thousand marks slipped between the layers of paper. The owner, chewing his cigar complacently, came and took possession of his fortune. But the lives of poor Jews were still tragic. One saw their bent figures, bearing parcels and frightened of their own shadows, slipping along tight against the house walls so as not to take up any sidewalk and avoiding entirely certain streets forbidden to non-Aryans.

In the evenings at a smart night resort, the *patron* drank champagne with sleek directors. Here no one gave the salute or the "Heil Hitler" or clicked heels. The atmosphere here recalled Paris or any other capital. The Egyptian proprietor had been everything, including a pimp and the lover of the wife of a big Düsseldorf industrialist. Now he welcomed the cream of Berlin diplomacy and the Reichswehr, women in elegant gowns, men in monocles. Here my employer felt at ease. Here he saw no Brown Shirts.

"After all, Germany's not so bad," he remarked to me in confidence, "especially as one can play ball with them." He raised his glass to drink with Herr Doktor Winkelmann,



Director General of the Silesian blast furnace syndicate, and with Director Koch of the *Berlin-Karlsruher Industriewerke*, remarking aloud, "A smooth-running and productive industry".

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## CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

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WHILE IN BERLIN I re-established contact with the Russian Fascist organizations, so thoroughly publicized in the Moscow trials, for a series of articles. Naturally I ran across old "friends" in old haunts.

Following one lead, I climbed the stairs of the former Russian school where I had once given lessons to eke out a bare living. It was scarcely recognizable. The big rooms had been done over and freshly equipped with maps and desks. For the doorman who took my coat, I wrote my name on a card and asked for Professor Savin.

"Oh, he left long ago," he answered, I thought, a bit sadly. "Ivan Nikolaevich isn't here any more. It's all changed."

A sleekly dressed man appeared, smiling with a certain malevolence, and inquired, in a Baltic accent, how I came to know the former professor of Russian literature. I explained.

"But this isn't just a school any more, strictly speaking, mein Herr. That is, it's a centre of education of Russians and Ukrainians in Germany."

Then Schmitt's mop of hair appeared in a doorway. Although nearly ten years had passed, he recognized me instantly, came towards me, and we shook hands. During our conversation I was given to understand that once the Führer had broken the Bolshevik yoke, Germany and Russia would be ideologically co-ordinated by such agencies of propaganda.

Every room seemed to be decorated with an immense picture of Rosenberg, the founder of this nucleus, whose habitués either spoke Ukrainian or talked with a strong Riga accent. Hostility to the USSR was being played down at the moment for diplomatic reasons; it had ceased to figure on the



front page of the Nazi press. But the agitation continued and men were being schooled to assume control when the expected invasion of the "Jewish" state should occur.

Rosenberg's diatribes against the "Red hydra" expressed the bitterness of a renegade. He was a Baltic Russian, born at Reval in middle-class circumstances. From student days he had occupied himself with the Aryan race question, discussing with fellow students over endless beers Gobineau's intoxicating race theories. These Baltic students liked to make out that they were the advance guard in the East of German culture. They paraded their sabre scars. The only thing that had ever impressed them about Russia was the feudal tone and the anti-Semitism of the Tsarist regime. Their leading spirits had sprung from the Marienburg chivalry, the old frontier guard of the "Grossmeisters". They were a bastard race, neither Slav nor German, which had always been a dissident element in the Russian Empire. Indeed the German General Staff recruited from the Baltic barons and baronesses its most active spies against Russia. Callow Reval and Riga youths in student caps aped the manners of Heidelberg and of the Prussian Junkers, drinking toasts to the Kaiser and later to Hitler.

Rosenberg's group comprised certain White Russian and Ukrainian nationalists. For years after Hitler's advent, when every decent and self-respecting Russian had long since left Berlin, he continued to rally the sordid remnant. In the Geisbergstrasse restaurants they drank their beer and vodkas at his expense. The aged bald-headed Ukrainian Hetman Skoropadsky was being kept at a villa near Potsdam with a view to eventualities. Millions of Ukrainians, mindful of his having lent himself to the horrors of the German invasion in 1918, clenched their fists at the mere mention of the Hetman.

A Ukrainian Nazi legion had been set up in Berlin under Party guidance, on Rosenberg's initiative. Its members were lymphatic and short-breathed from alcoholic excess, but they kept alive. When capitalist faith in the Reich flagged in Germany, in France, and in England, such evidences of zeal against Red Russia could be pointed out and used as a restorative. And then there was this propaganda centre at the former Russian school, with its committees, its literature, and its tentacles reaching deep into Slovakia, Austria, Poland and Rumania. So Rosenberg and his puppets were kept ready, to be whisked on or off the stage as political exigency demanded.

Coming into my hotel one afternoon I found waiting for me



a fellow with a face like a convict. He wore the insignia of the Russian Nazi organization—*Rond*—a white shirt, brown coat, and black trousers and boots. His face was vacuous, except for a certain expression of mischievous cunning. Apparently Schmitt had given him my address. This specimen of the new ethics and the new heroism brought me up to date with regard to Berlin's Russian Nazis. As he talked he executed pirouettes with his fingers on the table where the waiter had placed two beers; the fingers were short and crooked and had bitten nails. . . . It seemed that General Tourkoul had superseded General Lampe and was head of the White officers' association. Meller-Zakamelsky was the Russian Führer at Berlin and took orders directly from Colonel Skalon, at Dresden. Yes, explained Gregory, the previous Führer Svetasarov had got into trouble with the *Kriminalpolizei*. His secretary, Essaev, after sacking a West-Berlin apartment, had been sent on a vacation to the Moabit Prison.

"You see, that was bad for the morale of the *Rond*. So later they sent him to Franco to fight the Reds." And then there was that old drunk, Colonel Mikhailo, and the former croupier and sharper Dispatouli, Svetasarov's aide.

All the future liberators of "Little Mother Russia" had been having their troubles; they were finding it hard to adjust their personal lives and their idiosyncrasies to the drum rhythms beaten out by the Nazi theoreticians who employed them.

I was taken that evening by Schmitt to a little Ukrainian nationalist celebration. It was held at the place I had once seen beaten up by Horst Wessel and his men, but it had since been enlarged and altered and was decorated for the occasion with Nazi flags and Ukrainian blue and yellow banners. An effort was on foot to smooth out disagreements between various Ukrainian nationalist factions. Rosenberg and Hess were the idols of one element; another group associated with feudal landlordism and devoted its allegiance to Skoropadsky, his son Danilo, called "Judas Junior", and to Goering and the army clique. But now Wilhelmstrasse had issued orders that the factions should unite in common action against the USSR.

On one wall hung large portraits of the elder and the younger Skoropadsky, draped in yellow and blue and surrounded by likenesses of lesser land-owners. The other Ukrainian nationalist faction had the use of the opposite wall, which was dominated by two portraits—one of Andrey Melnik, a protégé of Rosenberg who had only a few weeks earlier been appointed head of the Berlin Ukrainian central



office, and the other of Nicholas Suchko, a Viennese "Ukrainian" who shared Melnik's authority and who represented his interests in Galicia, organizing assault troops among the Galician Ukrainians. Beneath Suchko's picture, in Ukrainian characters, was a motto that seemed somewhat incongruous at a moment when Goering was professing the warmest friendship for his neighbours beyond the Oder: "Ukrainians, free yourselves with German aid from the Polish yoke!"

It was more than ten years since I had first run up against Ukrainian nationalists in Polish prisons; in that interval the socialist and syndicalist elements had been entirely eliminated and those who remained were 100% fascists at the service of Rosenberg and the Gestapo.

With regard to the terms upon which factional differences were being composed, I based my conclusions on two circumstances. Danilo Skoropadsky was not present and the largest Ukrainian land-holding family had remained aloof since Rosenberg's reorganization had strengthened the extreme Nazi control of the Ukrainian nationalist organization. Furthermore, the speaker of the evening was Rosenberg's man, Alexander Sevriuk.

At forty, Sevriuk already had a chequered career behind him. As a student he had joined the Ukrainian Socialist Party. In 1918 he had been in the army of the terrorist bandit, Petlura, in support of the nationalist Ukrainian revolution. His record in the matter of pogroms was such that Rosenberg could have no doubt of his being a good Nazi. Beaten by the Red armies, he had fled abroad and lived for some time in Paris in the Rue Vineuse, separated only by a cloister from the popes, deacons and archimandrites of the Ukrainian branch of the Russian Orthodox Church. His samovar boiled hospitably. The Ukrainian fascists had made their peace with the Cossack associations and with other fascist elements in Paris. Sevriuk published Ukrainian bulletins, but had little success. Then he married a Frenchwoman and spent her savings on the nationalist cause.

As soon as the Nazis came to power, he packed his bags and left his two rooms to the moth-eaten popes and archimandrites and came to Berlin. Deeply disillusioned about White activities in Paris, Petlura's former aide quickly gained the protection of Rosenberg and became a leading champion of Ukrainian "freedom".

For Sevriuk's present talk, maps were produced showing German infiltration in the Carpathians, in Slovakia, and in



Galicia. From the little white and black circles one got the impression that the Ukrainian National Organization had powerful agencies throughout the Ukraine. The audience was serious and attentive, and Schmitt was taking notes while Sevriuk talked and pointed with a baton to the significant circles. Waiters fetched beers laced with vodka.

As I listened it seemed to me that only one presence was lacking to have made the evening complete, namely, the Austrian Archduke Franz Joseph of Habsburg and Lorraine, the pretender to the throne of Ukrainia.

I spent two highly educational and interesting weeks in the Reichshauptstadt, while the Dutch—South-American consortium was becoming a functioning reality. My *patron* and I returned to Paris, he with his contract and I with enough material on Berlin's White Russians to have made my trip with him worth while.

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## CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

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ONE AFTERNOON I was given at last my exact instructions. I was henceforth to represent the interests of "imports-exports" on the French-Spanish frontier. The customs officers, gendarmes, international police, spies and agents provocateurs established in the Pyrenees would henceforth be my clients or my enemies. My first job would be to facilitate that big deal concerning the anti-aircraft guns. Large sums were involved! Madrid agents had already deposited in a local Paris bank their letter of credit in the amount of a half-million pounds sterling. My boss had, meanwhile, taken over several small machine shops and laboratories for making precision instruments in the outskirts of Paris. They were also acting as agent for a number of American, English, and Czech firms. Business was good and the *patron* was in excellent humour. The financial papers printed his articles, written by me, and his latest mistress played opposite Sacha Guitry.



We were on the terrace of the Café Triomphe.

"We shall have an exciting trip," I observed to my companion, Robert, head technician of my employer's precision instrument plant at Billancourt. "Are you going on with me to Barcelona or will you stay at the border?"

M. Robert's eyes were grey and a little bulging. He was always somewhat sceptical about the *patron's* deals, being a member of the C.G.T. Now he smiled vaguely. "I'll be going on," he said. "There's stuff to unload and assemble there."

"Well, old man, it's going to be fun, I can promise you."

"At least we have a good car," Robert observed. "The new Peugeot's excellent—the firm spares no expense!"

He laughed.

By nightfall I shared Robert's opinion of the Peugeot. We were making good time along the mountain roads.

The evening papers had reported the formation at Valencia of the Negrin cabinet and were full of George VI's and Queen Elizabeth's coronation. They told, too, of an imperial conference at St. James's, of the suppression of a Communist revolt in Albania, and international policing of the shores of Spain by German and Italian vessels. What irony, that this should be undertaken by the German ironclads *Deutschland* and *Leipzig* and by Italian submarines!

Spain was in conflagration. Franco's Moors and his German and Italian allies were in their second year of ravaging the country in the name of national rehabilitation. Its people were bombarded day and night. Spain, overrun by foreign armies, was burning from Salamanca to Irun, from San Sebastian to Seville. The Republic was dying.

At the Franco-Spanish border, French customs officers and passport inspectors gave us a thorough going over. Beyond was Spain. Basque militiamen gave us the "Frente Popular" salute. We continued driving over the long and tortuous roads. We passed little villages composed apparently of no more than church belfries, cemeteries and a few ramshackle houses. The region was mountainous, abounding in beech and ash trees, in precipices and cascades.

Catalonia was defending herself. So much was clear the moment we set foot in Barcelona.

Superimposed upon half a billboard displaying a toreador in silver tights were red-lettered handbills calling the people to arms. Everywhere were leather-jacketed militiamen, carrying rifles; they stopped one abruptly, demanding identification papers. The city wore a stormy look much different from my



last visit. That had been when the collier *Dimitrios* was unloading back in 1930.

Then there had been a religious procession with friars carrying tapers and images glittering with gold and gems, the entire Holy Family decked out in jewels and lace. The cowed monks moved slowly, hollow-eyed. A sombre throng knelt in the streets, and windows and balconies were crowded with women singing canticles. Dressed in black and wearing great crosses round their necks, Barcelona's prostitutes sang in chaste ecstasy.

With a bunch of other sailors, I had gone to visit dives in the *Barrio Chino* section, with its narrow streets lined with pharmacies, cabarets and bars—the female flesh for sale at prices to suit a sailor's purse. The picturesque ferment in that quarter was like Marseilles' vieux port, or the kasbah in Algiers.

On the terraces of the cafés, many tables had been set out, and there were musicians in gay colours playing Catalan rhythms, black-dressed women dancing with staccato step and sharp movements of the head, while the public applauded or threw orange peel at the performers. Day by day the penny carnival had reigned in Barcelona.

Now machine guns had been placed in the buildings on Catalonia Square. Huge posters in red and white were displayed in place of the images of the Holy Family. Now and again troops went by—men with stern faces and raised fists, singing—recruits for the front, Spain's front, the world democratic front—such men as in late July of 1936, with their bare hands and a few outmoded guns, crushed and routed General Goded and his well-armed regiments.

At Barcelona Franco's putsch had been broken by the people's determination to clear out dives, brothels, landlords, friars and Franquist generals. Catalonia was in the workers' hands; and it was the richest province of the Spanish peninsula, comprising 24% of the total population and 75% of its industry and commerce. Under working-class control, new libraries, book displays and reading rooms had replaced casinos and bars. The famous monastery of Montserrat, on a hill at the edge of the city, had been converted into a sanatorium for tubercular children, of whom there were many in Spain. And, in order to carry on the fight against Franco's Moors and Falangists, machine guns and ammunition were being purchased with gems from Our Lady of Guadeloupe and the treasures of St. Ignatius Loyola's holy Company of Jesus—accumulations



that testified to the ruthlessness of the Spanish Inquisition and the piety of Philip II! How ludicrous that Philip II's relics should pass through the hands of an international munitions-broker!

Robert and I made our way through a sober, compact throng. At intervals we could hear rifles creak; militiamen were coming round the corner at the double. Finally we reached a grey building where two armed guards asked for our papers. We were soon taken to the second floor to see Lieutenant Yurri.

Some shipments of precision instruments sold to the Barcelona aviation section had got lost. Sabotage at the frontier again! Lieutenant Yurri, a bearded man with drawn features, beat the table with his fist and spoke as he gestured with his Browning to another man. He was a Catalan unionist. Weapon in hand, he had confronted Goded's machine guns, but against saboteurs he was helpless.

"*Madre la putta, compañero,*" he shouted into the mouth-piece of the telephone. "Who was to have taken over the shipments?" The Colonel, at the commission headquarters in the Rue Victor Emanuel III, had clearly stated that complete arrangements had been made for the deliveries.

The new observation planes that Catalan workers had made in Barcelona could not go up, for there were no altimeters, speedometers, or compasses. Dozens of telegrams flashed between Barcelona and Paris. My firm's agent had received the shipments at Port-Bou on the frontier, signed the papers and sent them beyond the Pyrenees. But they had not arrived; and while Barcelona waited, the Breda, Junker and Caproni planes were pitilessly bombarding the Catalan populace.

The situation was extremely complex, for Barcelona herself was disunited; the syndicalists and anarchists could never bring order into their revolutionary action without the help of the Communist Party. In spite of the magnificent spirit of the Spanish people, it was hard to see how, under such circumstances, victory over the disciplined legions of Hitler, Il Duce and their Spanish puppet could be achieved.

Robert went to work at once with the help of some French mechanics whom the company had sent ahead. I went to my hotel. Barcelona reminded me of my distant childhood during the civil-war years in Russia. But in the land of the Holy Inquisition the revolution had a Latin flavour. While air-raid sirens shrieked alarms, people whose faces were illuminated with grave exaltation would gather before the café terraces. The orchestra would play a "Pasodoble", while a couple on a



platform executed quick, neat steps to the click of castanets.

My hotel teemed with foreigners, journalists, munitions merchants, engineers, mechanics, collectors of Goyas, and curio dealers from the Faubourg St. Honoré, who were negotiating with the government for the purchase of Murillos. And then there were the endless International commissions, one to make a decision and another to revoke it. There was no running water in the bathrooms. The small lobby was subject to incursions of militiamen and resembled a market-place. The progress of the Catalan Republic was being debated in a dozen languages. The sun was hot and life in the Mediterranean port was flowing over. Serious-faced crowds strolled through the streets. It was the time for dinner—or what passed for dinner—a not highly appetizing menu.

In the lobby I talked with a young American aviator, Ben Lieder, who had left a job as aerial photographer at Roosevelt Field, Long Island, to volunteer in the Spanish air service. He enlarged upon the shortage of equipment, upon sabotage and the inexperience of the Spanish fliers. Enthusiasm alone couldn't win wars. If it weren't for the Russian technical advisers and equipment, Ben would have been forced to return by the first boat to his work at Roosevelt Field.

A few weeks after I had this conversation with him, Lieder was killed in action. . . .

I was on my way to my room when Barcelona became one long, vibrant scream. Motorcycles with sirens were shrieking through the streets and alarm whistles blew. This was the first warning of an air raid. Capronis were approaching from the Mediterranean. Crowds of anxious people fled into the hotel corridor. A black-clad woman pushed by me, her eyes wide with terror, carrying a baby waving his arms and legs. The streets instantly emptied. The musicians abandoned their instruments in the hotel dining room and dashed for the basement. People ran downstairs in pyjamas or underwear.

In the dimness of the cellar about fifty persons were jumbled together, talking excitedly. Someone tried to turn on the electricity, but nothing happened; perhaps the lines were down. I struck a match.

Then there was a voice softly asking me for a light. It spoke a sort of Anglo-Saxon Spanish.

For an instant my match lit up the face of a young woman in pyjamas. She was a little pale, but smiling, and she had a cigarette between her lips. I lit it for her.

"Thank you," she said in French.



"*De rien*," I murmured.

Suddenly there came the sound of planes taking off; Catalonia's Russian-made fighters. We could hear the powerful motors right above us.

"Thank God for the Russians!" the girl exclaimed.

I shared her admiration for the Russian "stub-noses" and the people who built them. Soon we were talking animatedly together and had introduced ourselves.

"My name is Catherine," she told me. "I'm American. How nice that you speak French!"

"I can struggle along in English, if you prefer," I said.

"That's wonderful! Do you know Paris?"

The explosions were beginning, not close, but towards the harbour. We could hear people shouting as they watched the sky battle from in front of the hotel. The raid was not a short one, though Catherine and I found it so; but eventually the Capronis were driven off. The band went upstairs and resumed its playing; we in the cellar hurried outside to watch the black fighter-specks tracing arabesques in the sky. Catherine's hand was in mine. It had a firmness and strength that was to linger in my memory.

To me Catherine seemed a typical American, though I had never seen her sort before. She was twenty-five and independent, and her forebears were pioneers who had crossed the Western plains in a covered wagon. Catherine was not the petty bourgeois tourist I had met in Paris and Berlin, but something out of Dos Passos or Sinclair. When she spoke, I could sense a strong impulse for self-improvement coupled with pride in coming from a simple family. Her mother was a schoolteacher, her father a mechanic; and her home had been a little wooden house at the upper end of Sacramento Street, from which one might see the whole of San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley. Thanks to patient study and native originality, she had become a citizen of the world. Catherine believed in people and in the working class. She rebelled against all injustices and pitied all suffering persons, and, being herself unremittingly devoted to self-perfecting, she stirred other people's enthusiasm. She treated me as a comrade from the moment of our meeting. Her blue eyes smiled, and she called me just Victor, without knowing a single detail of my past life. She was travelling, visiting museums and writing articles for some American papers and magazines.

Everything about her seemed strange. Although our lives had been so different, I felt that we had a whole world, a



universe, in common. We spoke of Russia, which she had just visited, and she talked to me for hours about her stays at Odessa, in the Crimea, and at Moscow.

"Such changes!" she observed. "In terms of production, the USSR is no longer situated between Western Europe and Asia, but *west* of Western Europe—somewhere between Britain and America."

She talked to me about the Russian state-controlled stores, about factory clubs, with their libraries and chess tables, about the plants whose employees became correspondents and sent articles to the papers, about technological improvements and athletic clubs. Then we talked of the Black Sea region—stiff cypresses, pines, blue heavens—where sanatoriums had been set up for workers and Red Army men. Splendid former palaces had been converted into rest homes where workers lay in clean beds and enjoyed some of the luxuries formerly possible only for the privileged.

Then Catherine told me about the American labour movement, the unions, the longshoremen, the share-croppers, about the vast areas of Texas and the Southern states and American Socialism. She was slim and supple; her teeth were dazzlingly white. Wisps of her dark hair, cut in a boyish bob, fell over her eyes when she shook her head, laughing, groping for a word, or correcting my English.

She had a fine chin, a short nose, arching eyebrows, and deep-set blue eyes that seemed sometimes bold, bright and hard. A mouth perhaps a trifle too large, with full lips. She carried her head very erect and after she said something, she raised her eyebrows as if awaiting an answer that would surprise her. Even when she was just listening, her eyebrows were slightly raised, in sharp contrast to a smile which seemed provocative at first. But this impression disappeared soon. Her skin was dark from the Mediterranean sun and her walk was mannish. I thought often that if her hair were turned up on her head in a knot she would look like one of those Greek maidens sketched on an antique amphora. She spoke French with a pronounced accent, but with charming effect, prolonging the *ou* and *ai* sounds.

She appeared so naïve in the nexus of intrigue at Barcelona, and her life seemed so clear and defined! We spent all our free time together. We took long strolls in the working districts of Barcelona. In the open doors old men and women stood looking out, and behind them the children, children with wide eyes and bare feet. From their sun-beaten doorsteps they watched uneasily when large trucks filled with recruits—their men and



sons—rumbled by. Often Catherine would approach such a group, single out a child and pat a pale cheek and let her hand glide over the black hair. When I looked at her I could see tormented eyes and a face that seemed shrinking with pain. Late at night we returned to our hotel, when the last lights had gone out and the stars descended large and bright. A few trucks went by. Sleepy soldiers asked us for identification papers and continued their rounds. Then everything was quiet again. The city seemed to sleep, a tired, nervous sleep. Only the moon grew bolder. Somewhere in the distance a shot would be heard, a searchlight pierce the darkness. Then Catherine would brace her body firmly against mine and stare into the sky—the sky of Barcelona at war.

But often we seemed to forget the surroundings, the old houses perpetually shaken by heavy vehicles and tanks rumbling by. For us there had begun a period of absolute happiness. And this happiness lay not in any one thing, but in many things at once; our every thought, every act was steeped in it, and it seemed never to leave us for a moment. During those first days of our friendship, there was a deep and silent rejoicing, a certain gratitude that we had met. When we spoke to each other, felt each other's nearness, exchanged a look, a thought, we would marvel how two people who were products of such different worlds could think, feel, understand the same things, have such similarity of emotion.

She talked to me about the States, her native California, the dusty plains of Oklahoma or New Mexico or Arkansas, about tractors running even furrows in the Kansas prairies, and fleets of lorries crossing all night from state to state, and enormous plants and mills, and cities, and 130 million people nervously pushing ahead, changing laws, establishing laws, creating labour unity, progressing, emancipating, working, sometimes mistaken but always pushing forward . . . an impatient, exciting and yet a peace-loving land. Walking close to me in the starlit nights of Barcelona, she spoke in low tones of her America, which she loved deeply with an expression of confidence and youth. I myself seemed transfigured by this new friendship. And as the days went by, I felt more tender and filled with gratefulness towards her. Unconsciously she seemed to open new horizons—horizons of a plainer, simpler life. Everything seemed so much less complicated with her. And unconsciously I seemed to push off that hour or day when deep-moving forces between two young people would burst the bonds of friendship and we would just become lovers.



I had loved physically many times before, but this friendship with Catherine was something new, something like a faience vase of a fine, delicate crystal which I was trying not to destroy.

The days fairly sped, when finally a telegram from my firm called me back to work at the Franco-Spanish border. I had to bid Catherine good-bye. She was setting out for Paris. We promised each other not to forget, and to write, but I knew our separation would create great emptiness within me.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

SOME HOUSES in a row—and a flight of steps at the end. The whole village hung on a steep slope. The church was at the top of the incline. From there a path turned left and brought one to the graveyard. Below ran the Sègre that divided France and Spain. The village had been populated with smugglers and customs officers time out of mind, and now were added international control agents.

I lived at a hotel-restaurant painted white, except for the bright scarlet and cobalt wooden ornaments of the cornice. My room was furnished with a bed-divan, a table and a whitewood buffet; the windows opened on furze-streaked slopes, plains trod by ox teams, slow and patient, and stretching west and east, the cloud-invested Pyrenees. There were naked rocks and powerful black eagles soaring from peak to peak in search of their prey. The hamlets of the Basque country were strewn along the twisting roads of that savage region. Every night long files of smugglers, two abreast, crossed the frontier to meet their fellows from the other side of the border. The ox teams were laden with supplies for the Republican armies. The Basques were of one mind—for the defence of their country. The fishermen, the peasants, and the smugglers were radicals and, at the same time, Catholics.

In the early evening several of us would assemble around a dish of chicken with rice and a bottle of wine. Our group included couriers from Madrid, delegates from an Aubervilliers



factory, an English newspaper man, some volunteers, and a newcomer—a White Russian who had left his job driving a taxi to join Franco's forces and was leaving that same night for Hendaye. Conversation at our table threatened to end in a fight.

"Traitor to the working class!" shouted the delegate from Aubervilliers.

"Dirty Communist!" retorted the Russian.

The Englishman was taking notes.

The "export-import" syndicate had people all along the border. They had changed their stations after Franco took Bilbao on June 21 and shipments now travelled by the Catalan frontier. The Catalonian government needed everything. When they wanted barbed wire, teletype machines or electric equipment, they had to apply to such agencies as my firm, who in turn represented Siemens, Pintsch and A.E.G. The boxes marked "Made in Germany" travelled through France to the Pyrenees border. Surgical instruments, drugs and medical supplies, machines, tools—all bore labels from Cologne, Stettin, Duisburg. Shipments of motorcycles came from Saxony, field telephones arrived from Bavaria, radio valves from Brandenburg. The boss must have been making a fortune out of his cordial relations with directors of German houses. We followed a routine of signing the clearance papers which were countersigned by a Spanish agent. The shipments were forwarded to Spain and my employer was paid immediately from Madrid's accounts in the Paris banks.

The rains had begun and the days dragged. The radio announced the transfer to Barcelona of the Valencia government. In the House of Commons, Mr. Eden replied to Labour criticisms of the "non-intervention policy" that the Spanish government was receiving plentiful supplies of munitions by sea, especially from Soviet Russia; that between January and September, Russia had sent to Spain ten times more in weight and four and a half times more in volume than during the corresponding period in 1936. What Mr. Eden neglected to mention was that only a small proportion of these supplies reached the Loyalists, owing to the action of Italian submarines, and in any event the amount of supplies sent in 1936 had been infinitesimal, no match for the Italo-German output. A few days later, Italian infantry landed at Franco's ports and Neville Chamberlain announced that Britain and Franco were exchanging commercial representatives. This announcement was the death knell of the Spanish Republic.



International control on the Pyrenees border had for some months been suspended and the commissioners were changed frequently at Bourg Madame, the tiny town to which I was moved. General Franco had taken Santander . . . Italian submarines were sinking Russian boats . . . And, all the while, the Spanish question was being earnestly debated at Geneva. A delegation of miners and three hundred Communist delegates from the Nieuport, Caudron, Citroen, and Ferodo factories had crossed the frontiers to Barcelona in order to supply the lack of skilled labour in the Catalan industries.

I missed Catherine and I was bored with the perpetual rains and annoyed by the frequently delayed shipments. I tried to find new interest in the Basque country and folklore during my stay on the border.

I spent many agreeable evenings sitting over a bottle of red wine with Basque smugglers who, like me, were waiting for their consignments. They told old stories and sang old songs in a monotonous cadence. It was a glimpse of true primitives in harmony with their region of bare rocks, predatory eagles, smiling hamlets and ancient churches. They had heads broad at the temples and tapering to strong, even obstinate, chins; their skins were opaque; their faces had the gravity and composure that peasants derive from the soil. With all that, they were also good and faithful comrades of the Left, sending delegates regularly to the workers' congresses at Bayonne. And, while they abounded in ancient folklore superstition, such as the belief in witchcraft, they were not only good contemporary revolutionists, but faithful Catholics, singularly attached to their church.

The bond, indeed, was reciprocal. The Basque priests took the people's part and fought against Franco's hordes. Eager to defend the Basque independence offered by the Madrid government, they fell in hundreds defending Bilbao. Basque youths, led by their curés, were ruthlessly executed by the Falangists, and scores of their obdurate abbés, belonging to the Christian Socialist group, the *Agrupacion Vasca de Accion Social Cristiana*, were thrown into Bilbao prisons. Thousands of pious Catholic Basques were executed in the spring of 1937 by Franco's Moors—in the name of the Church and in order to "re-establish respect for the Catholic faith". But actually these events were links in a chain that provided minerals for the Reich.

I encountered many refugees, persons fleeing from the massacre to hide in the mountains and cross the border. A wrinkled priest with silvered hair under his beret related the



capture by Franco of the town of Fontarabia. The killings had gone on for days and the city had been changed as by evil magic. Primo de Rivera's officers and the Falangists brought back with them the grand seigneurs of the feudal domains, the cowed monastics, and the beggars. While the streets still ran with blood, the Falangists ordered a parade. Shots were fired in the direction of France. Germans and Italians, flanked by Moors, waved swastika flags. The nativity of the Virgin was honoured. Franco's Spaniards and the Germans, "better Catholics than the Basques", paraded to the Guadeloupe sanctuary which dominates Fontarabia. My informant, an elderly father with his rough grey beard, stubborn look, and eyes too young for his age, had put on his cloak and hurried away in the night.

In the whitewashed room where we drank our wine at large wooden tables, a crucifix stood in the corner. The true religion was here, among these Basque priests who read *l'Humanité* and fought alongside miners, peasants and Syndicalists, Communists and Unionists. It was obviously they who had understood the real meaning of Golgotha. With their whole integrity they loved their country. Their concept of religion was miles removed from the hellish distortion of Franco, Mola and Quiépo de Llano.

The flying field of the Narbonne civic airdrome lay spread in the fading light. I had left Bourg-Madame by car, in accordance with instructions from the *patron*, to meet a plane carrying his head accountant, M. Simon. At last the plane arrived, and M. Simon got in the car beside me. He had a long, serious face and a sharp glance, and resembled a minor bank employee. He wore a ready-made suit purchased on the boulevards, unmodish footwear and a collar too loose for his thin neck. His skin was yellowish and his face inexpressive even when he was speaking of the *patron's* momentary difficulties.

"You know the firm takes excessive risks," he said with an air of disapproval. "The market . . ."

We were following the route nationale, which sloped upwards. Simon gossiped about surprising speculations in Paris real estate, about the syndicate formed to exploit mines in South America, but which was failing to pay dividends, and about the collapse of the Banque des Echanges, which the boss controlled.

"They've got to make a good stroke to put them on their



feet again," repeated M. Simon, drying his pointed nose. "About fifty millions. Well, you know what he is, *le patron*—a character—and a brain! I've been with him eight or nine years and seen some ups and downs, I can tell you. One good killing will fix everything. It's nothing to be astonished at, what with the way he throws money around."

M. Simon opened the *Gringoire*—he detested both Internationals and Chiappe and Carbuccia stood for his idea of democratic France. *Les Juifs* were fine chaps to the extent that they let him make money. But his present business was serious. He must work out in detail and bring to a head a big transaction—that old business of the fifty anti-aircraft guns and their Zeiss precision instruments that the "export-import" firm had undertaken to purchase for the Spanish government, and which had still not been delivered, though all arrangements had been made at the Barcelona-Madrid end. All the specifications had been gone into in Paris. The purchasing commission's military experts had examined the goods at Antwerp and test shooting had been done in Sweden. Everything seemed settled; the contracts had been signed and the Paris bank was prepared to pay the *patron* the sum of 200,000 pounds sterling upon the delivery on Spanish soil of the merchandise. Shipment across the Pyrenees had been agreed upon as less risky than travel round the Spanish coast. Lorries would be waiting to take over the stuff at the frontier. The stakes were high.

M. Simon's worn briefcase contained duplicates of the bills of lading. The commodities were listed as scrap iron. In view of the international regulation of the munitions traffic in Spain, all that ever showed now in such papers were substitutions, such as "potatoes"—"vegetables"—"sewing machines". But this time it read "scrap iron". Of course the purchasing commission in Paris knew all about these arrangements, which were merely to save the faces of frontier authorities in the Pyrenees. The Company's men at Bordeaux had already been notified. The crates would be sent there by sea from Antwerp.

My immediate job was to drive Simon to Biarritz, where he would meet the Bordeaux agents and tip them off. Following this, I was given instructions to return to Bourg-Madame. The instant the crates got across from France into Spain, a Loyalist representative and I were to wire to Paris and send the duplicates of the signed receipts so that the Paris bank, according to its instructions, might make the payment.

It was early in December and I was still waiting in Bourg-



Madame. M. Largo Caballero had come to Paris to discuss the shortage of arms, especially of planes and anti-aircraft materials. The government troops were fighting desperately before Teruel. Madrid was being bombed day and night by German and Italian planes. Then at last, on a rainy morning, an old servant came clattering in my dim room. A Bugatti sports model had stopped before the house and two well-dressed men presented themselves. I hurried downstairs. A man who identified himself as Marcel Didier drew out a letter signed by my employer. He explained to me, in the complacent tone of a man of affairs, that it was essential that he, as a director of the firm, should handle the conclusion of so weighty an international transaction as this business of the guns. He added drily that M. Simon needed me at Toulouse and that I could leave that evening.

The other man was a Spaniard. He frowned and said nothing, but his eyes moved restlessly under his beetling brows. The men's bags were brought up and they took possession of my room. M. Didier presented himself to the customs authorities; the inspector examined the collection of much-endorsed documents. Everyone was aware that "scrap iron" was a euphemism. All were sympathetic to the Spanish Republic. Fifty anti-aircraft guns, how they would be welcomed at Barcelona and Madrid! The next day the crates would arrive.

For two days I awaited M. Simon's arrival at the hotel at Toulouse. It was nearing five o'clock on the second day and already getting dark. Men were playing billiards in the café opposite. The bar was lighting up when a phone call came for me—long distance.

At the other end of the wire I heard Robert's voice. "Hello, Totor! Have you heard the news?"

"News? We don't get any news in this dirty *patelin* where I stay."

"Well, here it is. The scrap iron has been delivered!"

"Good!"

"What's good about a hundred and fifty crates of scrap iron going to Loyalist Spain?"

"Come on, Robert—what do you mean, scrap iron? Talk sense."

"We've been fooled, Victor—you and I and twenty million other people. The *patron's* pulled off the biggest deal of his life!"

I could hardly believe what Robert was telling me. And yet



—Simon's words came back to me. This would be the "big stroke". I hung up the phone and clenched my teeth so that my jaw hurt.

That must be it. The Spanish government had received delivery of a hundred and fifty crates of scrap iron—*actually* scrap iron as it appeared in all the documents. The munitions broker, by the most colossal of swindles, collected his 200,000 pounds sterling between the receipting of delivery and the discovery of the imposture, a matter of only six hours. Marcel Didier and the "Loyalist" government agent had disappeared.

The next day the papers announced the dissolution of the "export-import" firm, my ex-boss was already in Lisbon, on his way to "visit friends" in Argentina.

The judicial wheel was set spinning. A hue and cry of lawyers contested the legal technicalities of this fraud. But, in fact, Bofors still had its guns and only the Spanish Republic was victimized. The Loyalist commission had been acting contrary to article so-and-so of the non-intervention agreement with regard to the shipment of arms. There was no redress possible. Someone said that the firm's owner had acted for the good of the Spanish nation, being a friend of Juan March. I had only one terrific desire—to put a bullet through him.

Others, like Robert, spoke of the strange connection between the ex-"patron" and Commander Lustanau-Laclau, who was Marshal Pétain's adjutant and confidential secretary. This person was later apprehended by the Daladier government, court-martialled and detained in a fortress, accused of conspiring with the Germans. In 1937 he was acting as liaison between the Falange and Pétain. That same commander, Lustanau-Laclau, was affiliated with the fascist P.P.F., and served as go-between for General Lavigne-Delville, chief of the French Cagoulaards. As Paris correspondent of the *Weltdienst*, Lustanau-Laclau's work was closely interconnected with the "France-Allemagne Committee", the *Libre Parole* and the fascist clique around Benoist Mech, De Brinon, and the supporters of Pétain.

I returned to Paris and resumed my journalistic activity with fresh enthusiasm after this episode, and I did not cease to observe how link after link was being added to the chain of sabotage throttling the Spanish Republic.



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## CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

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BACK IN PARIS, I attended one of the Front Populaire meetings. Months had passed since my return and Europe had been through another crisis. Austria had been annexed by Germany and now, more than ever, the common man was clamouring for help to Spain.

At the Levallois quarter, young men with grave but radiant faces stood ready to offer their lives. "It's time to stop the fascist murderers," cried one worker, breaking in on the speaker. The streets were thronged with syndicalists, with the League of the Rights of Man, with Socialists and with Communists. There was also a war-veterans contingent, *les Gueules cassées*, carrying their banners.

There were cheers and singing—the "Marseillaise" and the "Internationale". Clenched fists were raised. There was a parade of veterans from the Spanish front. And from a thousand throats came the song:

"*Amis, l'univers nous envie,  
Nos cœurs sont plus clairs que le jour,  
Allons au-devant de la vie,  
Allons au-devant de l'amour.*"

A German labour leader and fugitive from a concentration camp made an address. The Préfecture had trucks and dismounted *Gardes Mobiles* on the scene, but with one small exception, there was no disorder. While shouts rang out against the reactionaries, Tardieu, Chiappe, Bonnet, Flandin, and Weygand, a little band of Croix de Feu made an ill-timed appearance, followed by some *camelots du roi* who attempted to distribute *l'Action Française*. They were summarily dealt with and the street remained littered with their badges, but the police did not interfere. A worker in baggy trousers held up by a sash wiped his big fist, with which he had just flattened the nose of a youth in a beret.



"Bastards!" he grumbled. "Paid by the bankers and the northern steel cartel. And calling themselves Croix de Feu!"

The cabinet convoked a high council of national defence. A plan was suggested to occupy the island of Minorca and, eventually, certain strategic points in Spanish Morocco. M. Blum inquired of the chiefs of the Army, Air Force and Navy what steps should be taken for the furtherance of this plan. Accustomed to be received with cheers and popular acclaim when he showed himself on a balcony, he was chilled by the reserve of the army and navy commanders, who preserved the inveteracy of the Dreyfus period and could not forgive him for being Jewish. If only he had been Chinese, Turkish, or Arabian! But, doubtless more important, they had also their aversion to the Front Populaire.

For the second time in two years, General Gamelin, the "strong silent man," complained of the lack of an adequate expeditionary force. And as for a general mobilization of four million men—oh, no, that was out of the question.

The octogenarian Pétain backed him up. An incursion into Morocco—why, that would be war with Franco. One could not send an expedition and expect that to end the matter. There would be international repercussions and that would lead to a general mobilization. After billions had been spent on the Army, the public that paid them discovered that the military leaders opposed mobilization because arms would have to be put into the hands of such people as steel workers, labourers—the men of the Front Populaire. And, of course, there was also that little difficulty—Pétain and Franco were old friends.

Admiral Darlan and General Villemain of the Air Force added their dissuasive voices to the chorus of reluctant warriors. The general staff talked of three frontiers to be defended in the event of war. They did not take the Russian alliance seriously and kept introducing learned historical parallels, to which the only answer, not feasible for luckless France, was the one the USSR had suggested by liquidating those generals who indulged in sabotage and high treason.

To cap the climax, Chamberlain, the Tory trickster, uttered his objection and his warning. He informed M. Boncour categorically that if France dispatched her divisions, England would regard herself as released from all treaty obligations to France.

Chamberlain's pressure was too much for the weak French government and no troops received marching orders. A great stigma rested on the second Blum government and on the French republic, but Mr. Chamberlain still had peace in his



time. The British Prime Minister entered into negotiations with Mussolini.

Austria had gone and Spain was dying. From German newspapers it was evident that Czechoslovakia was next on the list. During the eventful days of May, 1938, I began hurriedly to prepare to leave for Prague.

## *CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX*

IN PRAGUE I had the queer feeling that this spring would see the end of the young Czechoslovak Republic. People moved gravely through the streets, past shop windows containing displays of gas masks. They stood talking or just waiting before bulletin boards and on street corners. Air-raid warnings were posted all over town. People kept to their usual occupations, but were constantly grabbing the latest extra and pausing to gobble the news in front of a lighted café window. Dummy aerial bombs were planted at the principal street intersections. The war of nerves had begun.

Since I had left the train at the Masaryk Station, I had been increasingly convinced of the strength of the people of Prague, their democratic aims and desires. That same day I wrote a long letter to Catherine, who was in Antibes, and with whom I had been corresponding.

"I will try to write regularly, dear, but this crisis has come sooner than anyone expected and I'm a little bewildered. On the journey here, after crossing the Czech border, any experienced observers in matters of 'mobilization' could see movements of reservists of all grades joining their regiments. More soldiers than usual are in the streets and strong detachments are stationed at every tunnel and bridge. The nation is preparing for the worst. But I must say I have faith in this people.

"From what you hear in Prague, the Czech army alone would be adequate to bear the brunt of the first impact of Hitler's vast war machine. The Skoda works produce some of the best equipment in Europe, Czech technological research is



thorough-going, and a reservoir of war necessities has been created over a period of years to meet the needs of Russia, the Little Entente, and France.

"Bismarck once observed, 'Whoever controls Bohemia will control Europe.' It is true that the Anschluss has deeply disconcerted the Czech people, many of whom accuse official England and France of cowardice, blindness and bad judgment. But it really seems as though the efforts of the trade unions and the workers, who have been united throughout the world in denouncing such cowardly folly since 1933, should have their effect.

"Still, one must realize that dark reactionary forces are at work, a powerful international network stretching from Wilhelmstrasse to Downing Street, and that these forces have already scored heavily. The Rhineland remilitarized. The Loyalists crippled in Spain. Japan invading China. Belgium's neutrality benevolent toward Nazi designs. Poland and the Little Entente, both of which owe their existence to the Third Republic, intriguing with the enemy.

"But enough of history lessons. . . . It's been exceedingly hot here for a May day. There was very little news this morning, all the troop movements are kept quiet, but the crisis is getting worse. Henlein's men—Storm Troopers disguised in Sportlers—are getting more and more arrogant; soon they'll be coming into the open.

"The stillness of this city gets on my nerves; it's so unlike Paris. People's faces are serious; it seems as if they're searching each other for an answer that no one knows. There's less loud talk and laughter than there should be. When I walked by a few workmen building an air raid shelter, they were quite silent. No singing or whistling, no note of gaiety whatever, I talked to them, but their questions were embarrassing, especially to anyone coming from the West. 'What will France do?'—I wish I could answer. . . ."

Three successive shocks were administered to destroy Czechoslovak democracy—on May 21, September 11, and September 27. Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay were aware, from early in May, of the German preparations for a raid which would cripple the Little Entente, whose armies depended upon Czech arsenals. It would also render useless the Russo-French pact by destroying the link that Czechoslovakia afforded between the two greater powers—the pact which had forged the most formidable military alliance for the preservation of peace ever seen in Europe.



What was needed, then, was a press campaign to convince the public that Russia's army was weak and that the alliance was negligible. In the subsidized state of the press, the words of an American flyer once decorated by the Nazis at the Herrenclub, added to pronouncements by English Tory generals and some French reactionaries, sufficed. Wilhelmstrasse got to work. Henlein vociferated his claims to the Sudeten. Flurried diplomatic interchanges occurred between capitals.

On the very eve of the first stroke I lunched with a friend associated with the Socialist Party. A group of syndicalist delegates had just returned from Moscow. My friend had brought one of them.

He was a worker in a Pilsen factory, a man with a hard-bitten face and heavy glance. He had fought in the Austrian army and been a prisoner in Russia. When the Czech legion was formed on Russian soil, he had fought against the Red Guards. Now, at fifty, he had made three visits to the USSR. He spoke of how Czech youths were reading Barbusse, Romain Rolland and Gorki, and alluded to the co-ordination of the Russian military mission operating in Prague and the Czech mission in Moscow. He went on to speak of how German southerly expansion was blocked by Czechoslovakia. I was interested especially in his trenchant summary of the Balkan and Eastern situation.

He held that Slavic liberal influence was strong in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and that Rumania would be forced to go along with France or, at the worst, remain neutral if the Boyar influence proved too strong. He was scornful of the "commercial traveller Beck," but believed that Poland could be kept from a débacle. His final word was, "Remove the corrupt governments and you will have a strong, liberal Balkan alliance."

On Friday, May 20th, Prague awoke to overcast weather, blocking out the spring sunlight. The newsstands were thronged with persons waiting for a new edition. Henlein's brawling had continued and he was strengthening his pressure. The report ran that German troops were approaching the Czech border. At Cheb a Czech frontier guard had exchanged shots in the night with Henlein's assault units. Troubles had started at Karlovy Vary\*—between Henlein's men and Czech authorities.

I decided to take the next train to the Sudeten. . . . Some years before Karlovy Vary had been the most popular spa in *Mittel-Europa*, thronged with Scandinavian, English and Amer-

\* Karlsbad.



ican tourists. Now the city was singularly quiet. Jewish-owned stores were shuttered and Czech police were guarding the streets. Here and there you could see copies of the *Stürmer* or the *Angriff* lying under benches.

I had met a young Swiss news photographer on the train from Prague. She was an Egyptian born in Zurich. While we were having dinner together, two of Henlein's Sportlers made remarks about her dark complexion and opaque skin. Their morbid impulses aroused two young men with SA bearing, but not in uniform, at an adjacent table. They began making comments in German.

I could take so much and no more. When the remarks became too offensive I rose and punched one of the hooligans in the face. There was a fight and the police intervened.

At police headquarters I explained the whole situation to a very correct bald gentleman in a navy blue suit, who smiled apologetically through his gold-rimmed glasses. He was discernibly pleased with the black eye of the Sportler beside me. The two specimens of German Sudetenland youth, spitting teeth and rubbing dislocated jaws, accused me of political violence, interfering with purely Czech domestic affairs, while the pure blood of their superior race trickled down their noses. A citizen testified willingly that the young woman had been insulted. I showed my press card and emphasized my connection with the *Národní Listy*, the *Cesky Deník* and the *Prager Presse*. The Czech commissioner apologized. The bruised and beaten Henleinists were taken away.

I had experienced the Sudeten crisis on my own skin.

When I returned to Prague the Czech government was ordering the mobilization of two classes of reserves and of technicians of specialized units. The alarm brought into sharp emphasis evidences of Czech stamina, the keen look, the forceful forehead, the energy of gait—all characteristics of the firmness and obduracy of the Western Slav. White-gloved militiamen were directing traffic to expedite the passage at crossings of army trucks, cars and motorcycles.

But mobilization was not war. Between mobilization and war a train of negotiations occurred. The contacts were continuous between Moscow, Prague, and Paris on the one hand, and between Paris and London on the other. Franco-British community of action had been determined upon in London conferences, of which Daladier had been able to say to his electors, "We have managed, in entire agreement with the British government, to work out for the first time a plan of diplomatic



preventive action." The London-Paris tandem was functioning; Mr. Chamberlain's government was advising the French government to avoid any imprudence; and for greater security, it determined to approach the German government—being, as it appeared, on excellent terms with Wilhelmstrasse—and assume the negotiatory role of "mediator." It seemed that the Führer's patience would come abruptly to an end if German blood were to flow in Czechoslovakia. As a reply to this threat, Mr. Henderson, the British ambassador, laid emphasis on an utterance of the Birmingham sexagenarian before the House of Commons on March 21:

"Although Great Britain has no clear commitments in Central Europe, if France should be drawn in, in one way or another, Great Britain would be found at France's side."

Herr von Ribbentrop was not at a loss in dealing with that Delphic utterance. While such conversations were in progress, one of Ribbentrop's clients, M. Georges Bonnet, a bitter enemy of the Front Populaire, made the rounds of France's friends and allies to obtain their reaction to the crisis. He elicited from Mr. Bullitt, the American Ambassador, the statement that "The United States can regard not otherwise than with sympathy every effort to preserve peace." He knew anyway that American foreign policy in Europe followed Downing Street's.

Mr. Lukasewicz, the Polish Ambassador, was noncommittal; but Colonel Beck's new orientation toward Germany was plain, and the joint hunts and banquets of the Polish *Pans* and Hitler's acolytes were filling pages of the newspapers. Of course, Wilhelmstrasse had been encouraging Poland's views with regard to grabbing the Teschen district in Czechoslovakia. At my hotel in Prague I had before me Poland's official papers, such as the *Kurier Codzienny* and the *Kurier Poranny*, which expressed views resembling the Ambassador's.

The French government had lent Poland 1,300,000,000 francs, represented to French taxpayers as an aid to a traditional and supposedly loyal ally. But France's alliances were decaying since the Front Populaire participated in the government. Now German industry and capital had been finding their way to Warsaw, and Poland had linked herself to Germany without the French government seeming either to notice or care.

Yugoslavia was the next supposed ally to be sounded. She had by that time made peace with Italy. At Belgrade you could now ask for a copy of *La Stampa* without risking a cracked crown. There was also the German trend in Yugoslavia: Herr von Neurath's visit to Belgrade on June 7, 1937; Mr. Stoyadin-



ovich's visits to Berlin, upon which the Reich had lavished all its ritual pomp.

Rumania, too, seemed a weak reed. She declared she would determine her course when the time came and her press was equally equivocal. Her Foreign Minister Micescu had been holding conferences with Colonel Beck at Cannes. It was no aid to friendship with France when the Goga cabinet retired on February twentieth and was succeeded by the semi-fascist government of the Patriarch Miron Christea.

The nations of the Little Entente owed their very existence to France and the men of Verdun, and their people knew it; but their fascist governments were now associating themselves with the general cry that conservatives were raising throughout Europe, "Down with the Front Populaire, so dangerous, so bad for investments! Down with the Franco-Soviet pact! Frenchmen, choose between the Little Entente and the USSR!"

Greece, now ruled by the iron hand of my old friend Metaxas, had a shuttlecock policy veering between London and Berlin, and was certainly no friend to any Prague-Paris-Moscow understanding.

Direct and independent action by a French national coalition government ranging from Thorez to Paul Reynaud, Benes's Czechoslovakia, and the USSR, might without other aid have crushed any "expansion" attempts of the Third Reich in infancy. The people were demanding it, political considerations required it, and the German General Staff were having nightmares in expectation of that grip of steel, as they thought of the powerful Franco-Czech-Soviet armies.

To fascist-inspired editorials, Russia's answer was to redouble her assurances of staunch adherence to her agreements. In countless assemblies throughout the USSR the desire was expressed of stopping fascist aggression. Moscow correspondents of the Leftist Paris press reported that the USSR had 4,000 heavy bombing planes ready to take off for Czech airfields, constituting a serious menace to the heart of Germany.

One accordingly looked again to Paris and London. But now the reactionary press began pouring out horror tales about Germany's military power, about the completed plans for a Blitzkrieg and a sudden invasion from the Rhine, about trained army reserves of two million combatant troops, and about unlimited German productive facilities. As though no one had ever before heard of any of these dangers or warned against them!

It was then that I remembered the pictures presented by the



great German seaports of Hamburg and Bremen, the furlongs of grey waters dotted with steamships. Day after day, and faster and faster, the great steel hulls were discharging commodities essential to the Reich's rearmament programme. Would the bit of overtime French workers could contribute, counterbalance that stream of scrap iron and copper surrendered for profits to produce German tanks and guns? The Reich's factories were working under a speed-up, until by 1938 Germany was producing 22,991,000 tons of steel, more than Great Britain and France combined. There was little assurance that the workers' overtime would benefit France, rather than France's disloyal investors.

And after having supported German rearmament, the bourgeois press was clamouring—

"Germany and Italy have stolen a march on us. They can make in six months what would take us three years. National self-preservation requires superhuman effort. Labour must take a brace . . . must accept a forty-eight-hour week . . . a sixty-hour week." Léon Bailby and his like were declaring that "the onus of responsibility rests heavily on Labour and the Front Populaire."

One might call this hysteria—only it was bought and paid for.

Just before leaving Prague, I received a letter from Catherine: "Dear Vitia: I decided to return to the Riviera. The days here are lovely, the nights starlit and bright. I love these Riviera nights—they remind me of California. And although I live only a mile outside Antibes, the stars are like those in the country, so much nearer than in town. . . . In Antibes there are dozens of Spanish Franquist refugees who are packing their valises and boasting about returning home. A bad omen. Frankly, it looks like the end of the Republic.

"Nothing exceptional happens here. I write and take long strolls in the countryside. Lately I have been accompanied on my walks by a funny little curé, Père Drouet. We have long conversations, which are usually quite interesting. We talk about the last war—the curé is a veteran—and we argue about religion in Spain. As a matter of fact, I have begun to 'liberalize' the good curé. . . . He attributes it to my charm.

"The other day the curé and I were fussing around his garden when a young man in a wind-breaker, not more than twenty or so—with his leg amputated just above the knee—an empty trouser hanging loose—looking thin and pale, came



along on his crutches. Imagine my surprise when he introduced himself as being from the U.S.A.—a cigar worker from Ybor City, Florida, who had gone to Spain early in 1937, and was wounded at Teruel. He is convalescing here and having trouble with the American Consulate in Nice, some difficulty about his passport. A pretty sight. The first wounded American soldier I have seen in this war. I am afraid there will be many more to come.

“He showed me photographs of his people in Ybor City. He claims the labour temple in his town has a fine library. That’s where he brushed up on his social consciousness, reading all about Spain and France and Russia. He is a fine boy. The curé, Don and I are now an inseparable trio.

“I received a letter from Barcelona. It’s filled with atrocities performed by Franquist Moors and Nazis in occupied towns. . . .

“Please write often, and don’t forget to put a copyright on the letters you send me—otherwise I may turn into a plagiarist!

“With love,

“CATHERINE.

“P.S. Don is somewhat cheerful as he claims his one leg will keep him out of the big show, which is inevitable, and he’d rather be in this one. What do you think?”

## CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

ON THE point of entering a little café on the Avenue Wagram, I stopped, arrested by the shouts of news vendors. They dropped their packets of papers, sprang on their bicycles and were off again. “*Paris Soir!* Fifth edition. Czech Scare! Nuremberg Congress!” My head felt a little dizzy and I went on into the café. The air was too sharp and the chairs too chilly for sitting outside. Autumn rains had commenced, which converted the pavements into mirrors reflecting the myriad lights of Paris.

The rawness crept through one’s damp shoe soles. Conscious



of a draught, I dug myself into a corner and ordered coffee. The café was packed. A man sat at my table, a German refugee with a satchel full of penny novelties; he unfolded the *Pariser Tageblatt*. My mind wandered from the shabbily dressed refugee and his satchel to the well-fed, contented faces of two French bourgeois, seemingly disturbed by the presence of the *Juif*. For a moment the sense of rawness and bleakness in the world's atmosphere was reflected in this pavement café scene. Here was the victim—one of many. The man with the satchel had fled terrorism in Germany, then in Austria, then Czechoslovakia. Now he was in Paris—but for what brief safety?

I pulled out my *Ce Soir*. Another man had entered and was ordering in a very English voice. He looked vaguely familiar and—yes, I had seen him somewhere—on the Pyrenees border. That was it. He was a London journalist. After recognizing me, he came to sit at my table.

Mr. Hawthorn, or Mr. Pennington, or both, I can't remember which, had a hesitancy of speech and gesture. He was a correspondent for papers, whose owner promoted the view that England was a snug little island far removed from the agitation of the Continent. Mr. Hawthorn had first made a hit with some humorous bits and satirical pieces about Central Europe; he went there, visited the zoo and the Zeughaus, and did Berlin with the "light touch." His travels were arranged by "Cook" and he had various social ties in Berlin. He was chatty on the European situation and his gossip articles on the fascist movement appealed to a certain public. From these articles even respectable, complacent English folk inferred that the fascist and Nazi movements were a new fad that was all the rage in Central Europe, like the Lambeth Walk in London. Thus sterilized, Goebbels's lies were digested without discomfort. After all, there was some basis for Henlein's claims to the Sudetenland! It was doubtless a great satisfaction to hold such dispassionate views—assured that one's own interests were not at stake.

Mr. Hawthorn-Pennington's embarrassment became rather acute when I asked for his political views. Especially interested in the occult, he kept drawing the conversation back to mediums, phrenology, mesmerism and clairvoyance. He had, in fact, no opinions, except those which he received ready-made from day to day from the German Press Bureau. He had been going there about ten every morning, when he was in Berlin, and spending the rest of the day with his pipe in a comfortable chair at the Bristol Hotel. Under cover of his British passport,



he indulged in occasional sly jests at the expense of the Hitler regime, a sportsman's potshots, as it were.

On instructions from his press, he had traced out the operations of the National Socialist system from its leaders, Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels, down to small punitive expeditions of the Gestapo and SS with trucks, motorcycles and machine guns into workers' slums or Jewish sections. On such scenes his eye had rested phlegmatically. Not much harm in them—ephemeral extremes and excesses incidental to the setting up of any new social order. He thought fascism would have a future; however, the thought afforded him no joy. It touched him at one point for he was a fervent Anglo-Catholic. And, indeed, he took in only so much of the European upheaval as was visible from that small peephole. He continued assuring me that his assignment to the Franco-Spanish border had been the toughest one he ever handled.

As we parted, the sixth edition of the *Paris Soir* was being shouted and street-walkers were beginning their regular circuit of the Avenue Wagram. Hawthorn said he often came to that café and spoke of a certain Ivan Ivanovich, a nice Russian whom he knew and who had lost everything in the Revolution.

"Tut, tut! What a pity!" he sighed.

He extended his hand hesitantly, a dry hand for an arid cordiality.

The Nuremberg meeting of September 11 produced a fresh alarm. It was taken as a signal for Henlein's assault detachments to begin a general massacre, a Czechoslovakian Bartholomew's Eve.

There was fighting in numerous frontier villages on the nights of September 13th, 14th, and 15th. A great many German "tourists" and ostensible peddlers flung off their disguises and came out in their true characters as military and political organizers of the SA and SS.

Would Berlin's bluff be called? The German General Staff had all too clear a vision of having to cope with armies of ten million men on Germany's Eastern and Western fronts. For all their successes, Herr Abetz and his agents must certainly have been forced to acknowledge the strength of the public war sentiment in France. The rank and file who would have to keep France's war machine going were prepared for general mobilization. The just cause had excited almost universal enthusiasm. Even France's rural petty proprietors were clenching their fists and exclaiming, "We can't sell out our allies. This time, we



must take a stand." Similar galvanic currents flashed through Czechoslovakia and the USSR.

But France's two hundred families invaded the Quai d'Orsay. They had their man well entrenched there, M. Bonnet, the man who reared the tombstone of the French Third Republic. The creature of banking interests, M. Bonnet made light of Verdun and the Marne, cared little for the stability of Europe, or democratic principles, and was repelled by the prospect of Russia's intervening decisively. Consumed with class hatred, he resorted to London—in other words, to the self-confessedly unarmed nation which was England in 1938. Czechoslovakia was counting the hours as the axe hung over her head—while Bonnet kept crossing the Channel to confer with the Birmingham huckster. The Paris-London tandem continued to careen to a European and, as it has proved, a world holocaust.

Mr. Chamberlain's trip to see Hitler on September 15th opened one of the blackest chapters in the history of humanity and of human freedom. France—or her "responsible" leaders—had chosen to associate France's destiny with that of an ill-armed and reactionary England, and a fascist Poland, regardless of French interests, affiliations, and treaty obligations. If there were either honesty or love of country in Georges Bonnet, words fail to express the vertiginous folly, the bloated vacuity, of his diplomacy!

September 29, 1938—fog and darkness at the corner of the Rue des Acacias. It was late. One occasionally caught the flare of a lighted match.

The dark, narrow street begins at the Avenue de la Grande Armée; here the buildings are mostly old and there are some *bistros* and small hotels with rooms rentable by the hour or the afternoon, and the "girls" get busy at midday. At the other end are some new buildings, including the Hotel Miami, where I had rented a modest room. There was a suggestion of carnival and magic in the electric lights, here clustered about three *bistros*, two hotels, a cinema and a dance hall. Now these lights were dimmed. Even motor horns were muffled; their shaded headlights cast bluish rays. It was the middle of the Munich crisis. Half a dozen bicycle police were wheeling gravely about, their white clubs peeping out from their capes.

The bar at the hotel entrance was dimly lighted. Some men leaning on their elbows were going over the news. Was it war, was it peace? The radio announced that general mobilization



next day had been ordered in Germany. From the same radio I had heard Chamberlain's speech of Tuesday evening. September 27. It was conclusive enough: "Whatever our sympathy may be for a small nation menaced by a great and powerful one, we cannot under these circumstances undertake to draw the entire British Empire into a war on that ground alone." There was no allusion to the collapse of collective security in the East; Chamberlain left that, rather, to be established by his visits to Hitler.

The farce proceeded. An "arbiter" was selected from the other end of the Axis. The *Journal* and *Le Temps* reported how Il Duce was "employing all his gifts to draw Hitler into a four-power conference." Mussolini, Bonnet, Chamberlain, and the Führer had reached a decision—they would confer at Munich.

Czechoslovakia thrown to the lions. The USSR rebuffed!

Organized labour in its millions was protesting, but only twelve hours of conference were required to wipe out democratic Europe. The Munich pact was already a bitter reality. The veterans of the World War scratched their scars and reflected. The men of 1940 lay already entombed beneath a stone slab too heavy for them to lift.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

IN THE Boulevard des Italiens cars stood rank on rank. Drivers raised a din with their horns. It was the lunch-time traffic jam on the Rue Auber. Paris again wore the gala look which by some magic is her norm. France was at peace once more.

Tourists, their anxiety quieted by the recent "peace pact," thronged to the American Express to cash their cheques. It was the busy hour.

But I spotted her instantly.

She was wearing a sort of topcoat of bold plaid, cut in the inimitable American fashion with the sportswear note that one



cannot fail to identify, and she had a bright leather purse tucked under her elbow. She was stepping along confidently, with her usual winning smile.

At this place I had met her every day since she had returned from Antibes. But today she was pausing before a window:

"Passages to U.S.A.—Tickets—Information."

So she was going home!

Many things flashed through my mind: our meeting at Barcelona, our spontaneous fondness, her whole-hearted response. In her company I had never been bored or distressed. Life shared with her seemed to hold out a prospect of fullness and innocence.

I made my way through the crowd to join her.

On the terrace of a *prix fixe* restaurant, Catherine was trying to explain something to a puzzled waiter.

"An American dish?"

"Yes." His eyes danced.

"But, Madame—this is a *prix fixe* restaurant!"

"Yes, Catherine," I interposed. "Twelve francs fifty with the usual *quart de rouge, soupe aux légumes, chateaubriand aux frites*—"

She cut short my enumeration. "Believe it or not, all I want is plain ham and eggs, U.S.A. style."

The waiter went away mumbling something about Americans and extravagant dishes at the rush hour.

"Catherine," I said, "it's a bad omen when I hear you order an American dish in a *prix fixe*. Sure sign of homesickness. Are you really going back?"

Catherine gave me a quick glance. "Yes," she said. "Back to good old San Francisco."

"Sacramento Street," I mused.

"On top of a hill—"

"Near a drugstore—"

"Don't forget the Esso Station—"

"And the Sicilian grocer that used to kid you when you were that high—"

"Number 3231—"

"Exactly."

I leaned forward across the table. "You see how well I remember everything you said? I probably could find my way blindfold to that little wooden house."

There was a pause. The waiter, with the same puzzled look, set the "American dish" down in front of Catherine.

"And I'm pretty sure I could find my way to a certain street



with a little park and a statue of Pushkin holding a book . . . and blue-white snow, and sparrows fighting for crumbs in a corner . . . and a great big Ivan, decorated like Santa Claus, asking how the little Barin's health was . . ."

Then we were on the pavement again, marching silently.

"Catherine—have you nothing especially important to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, but I have!" She raised her eyes and looked at me. "Your letters—I must know them by heart. . . ."

"You mean in spite of my pestering you with politics, crises, prognostications and changes of cabinets—"

"Yes—but there were the P.S.'s."

"That's what I was—thinking about."

At this moment two red taxis halted and the drivers began having a war of words, complicated on one side by a strong Provençal accent, and on the other by a broad suggestion of Russian. The Frenchman said something about the Russian being a *merdeux* and the Russian alluded to a forthcoming broken nose. . . .

"Victor—your countryman—doesn't it remind you of things? Only to have such an argument in public, he must have his *papiers en règle*. . . ."

"That's what I love about Paris—a frank discussion."

"A brawl—*le populo*—the free spirit of France! How long will it last?"

The traffic jam was heavy now with sightseeing cars. They were packed with German tourists. "*Käse's Rundfahrten—Berlin-Paris*" was painted in large white Gothic letters on the buses' sides; a little swastika flag flew alongside the tri-colour.

The taxi-drivers stopped arguing and stared at the two sight-seeing buses along with the passers-by—a news vendor, a *midinette*, a couple of workers.

"The first tourists," someone said.

"Yes," I heard next to me. "And more to come."

We continued walking in the direction of the Boulevards. In the Boulevard de la Madeleine we reached the spot where we usually separated.

"Catherine," I blurted, "may I come along with you?"

"Oh, darling, but of course!" she said gaily.

"No, but what I mean is, the long way, the whole way!"

We were opposite the Madeleine. Catherine paused, gasped. I could feel her hand hesitate in mine. People jostled us, making little remarks. But we just stood there. A new epoch was beginning. All my hopelessness at a Europe cracking open,



tumbling into an abyss, dispersed in the sweet, rain-washed air.

Catherine's features were a little tense and startled; her lips were pale and half-open with surprise. I noticed that she had a few freckles. But her very blue, very tender eyes looked at me seriously and she smiled shyly.

"Yes."

## *EPILOGUE*

IN WRITING this volume I have knelt, so to speak, in self-searching. This self-searching has shown me a life typical enough of our period, some of which was spent in gross darkness and following after strange gods.

Yet even blind stumbling in chaos, frustration, and confusion—a confusion, in our day, that has penetrated to the very roots of being—must either bring one, at last, to a cynical insensibility or rouse one to such a frenzy of utterance as may discharge the soul of its stifling weight of accumulated bitterness and oppression. Reviewing what I have written, I conceive mine has been something more than a mere inarticulate cry; it has been, rather, an appeal, on the basis of what I have known and felt, from the false gods to the true. It has been a hard and perpetual struggle for me and many of my generation. I have been a wild boy on the Russian steppes; the associate of such obscure martyrs as the Finnish Savoonen; the tool of desperadoes and the companion of their agents in the years of chaos in Berlin; an associate of Berlin workers endeavouring to assert their rights and preserve their free institutions; a victim of police brutality in Poland and Italy and Greece; a bootblack, industrial worker, student, seaman and seamen's organizer, conscripted soldier, taxi-driver, and valet to a male prostitute. I have frequented Arab souks, the slums and refugee quarters of Piraeus. I witnessed the impassioned devotion of Spanish Loyalists, and was present at the Gethsemane of the Front Populaire in France. On the other hand, I recall the wretched-



ness of a "privileged" childhood in Tsarist and wartime Russia; I recall the conditions and attitudes of teachers and pupils in the French and German schools—the brutality in German institutions and the vapid complacency in the French; I remember the predatory intrigues of Greek shipowners, the failure of the colonial systems to support the claims made for them; the extension to the Balkans and elsewhere of the Nazi network; the futility and the hypocrisy of Geneva; and, in forms too numerous to be here recapitulated, I have been made aware of the actions of the privileged and governing element in aiding the rise of fascism.

In short, this narrative, if I have realized my intention, has an interest over and above that arising from its variety of scene and hazardous circumstance. My own vicissitudes have been merely incidental to my becoming acquainted with wider hardships and suffering, and to my gaining insight into the workings of a social system whose methods are difficult to envisage and understand.

All the submissions, idolatry, compromises and degradation to which my generation in Europe was conditioned from earliest childhood inevitably had their issue in bankruptcy of conscience, debasement of feeling, hatred, and finally war. Men and women of my generation and older proved themselves helpless to prevent the recurrence of war—though the borders of the Rhine, the Meuse and the Mazur swamps were still reeking with blood and bristle, with memorials of the holocaust of 1914-18.

But to you, men and women of today and tomorrow, I would put this question: I would ask, shall we again permit our governments to forget that only through collective security can we have a peaceful, progressive world in which we may abolish the fearful recurrent cycle of unemployment and want, discontent and factional strife, the gangsterism and demagogism prevailing in politics, the conversion of domestic dissatisfaction into racial and international antipathies that lead to bigger and better wars?

Unified action by the nations of the world could have prevented the conflict, or made it briefer and less bloody. This observation is offered with no wish to weaken the confidence with which we must face the future. The purpose is, rather, to render vivid a truth which a great American, Abraham Lincoln, stated when he hoped that the war between the Union and the Confederacy might still be averted: "Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always, and when, after much loss on both





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